PUBLIC EDUCATION 60 YEARS AFTER *BROWN*

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE LAKOFF

# The Progressive

May 2014

## Show Me the Money: Meet the Multimillionaire Squeezing Missouri's Schools

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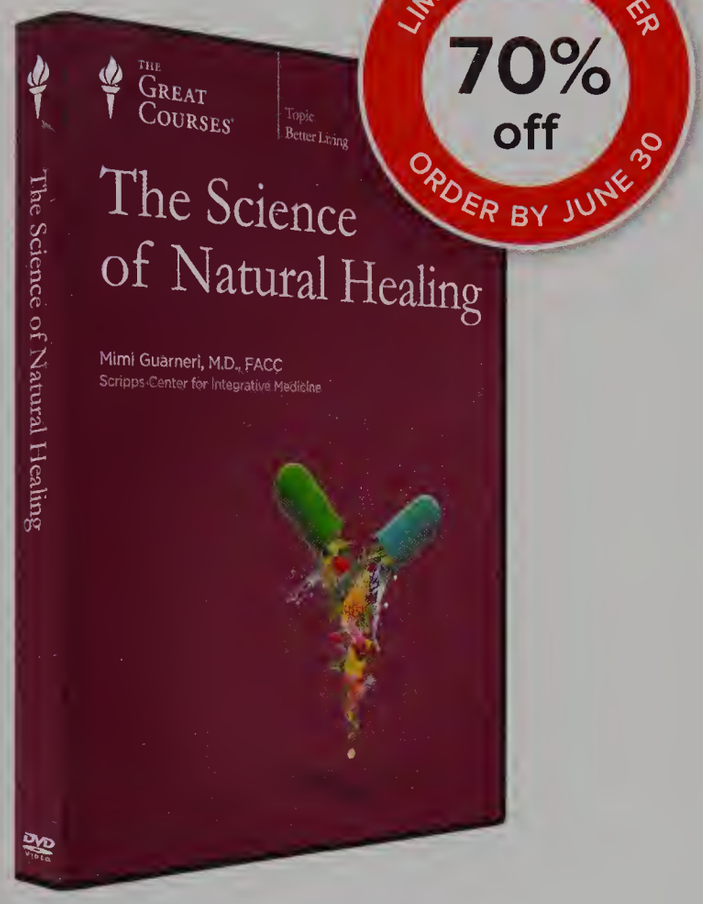


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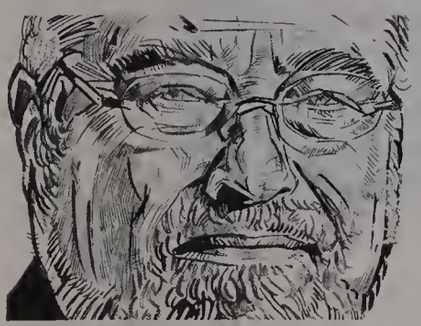

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This issue of *The Progressive*, Volume 78, Number 5, went to press on April 3.

**Editor's Note** Ruth Conniff

# Joining Forces

Get ready, friends, I have some really big news: I am thrilled to announce that *The Progressive* is joining forces with the Center for Media and Democracy.

We are merging our two national, progressive nonprofits, and I could not be more excited about what this means, both for the magazine and for the broader progressive movement.

*The Progressive* was founded by Fighting Bob La Follette early in the last century to take on the original robber barons—Big Oil, the railroad trusts, and all the forces of greed working to undermine the public interest. The Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), through its research into the Koch Brothers, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), dirty industry, and dark-money groups, is leading the fight against the robber barons of today.

Lisa Graves and Ruth Conniff

CMD made ALEC a household word—and set off a rush to the exits by the group's corporate membership—when it broke the biggest leak in that nefarious organization's history. Now we know that corporations actually vote with friendly state legislators on model legislation behind closed doors before it is foisted on unsuspecting citizens.

By tearing the mask off ALEC on its ALECexposed website, CMD performed a great public service.

And that's not all.

*The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, and many other news outlets regularly cite CMD's investigative research on issues like the Koch Brothers and mapping the rightwing infrastructure. With its original research and websites, CMD has a powerful and respected voice that will strengthen *The Progressive*'s impact.

Over the last year, *The Progressive* has been working closely with CMD. We relied on its investigation into local homeland security targeting of Occupy activists for a cover story last year. CMD's work led to our cover story on the Keystone XL Pipeline last month. And, on the cover of this issue, we feature CMD's exposé of Rex Sinquefield, a plutocrat in Missouri who is strangling the Show-Me state's public schools.

In March, *The Progressive* and CMD moved in together at our offices at 409 East Main Street in Madison. We cleaned up and put a fresh coat of paint on the walls. We moved

around our cubicles, so the two staffs are entirely integrated. We are blending our families into one better, stronger operation.

The new Progressive, Inc., will be a cutting-edge research, educational, and journalistic powerhouse. We will have a greater reach, a bigger impact, and a sturdier financial base.

Lisa Graves is our new publisher, and the new president of *The Progressive*, Inc. Lisa is taking on the details of managing the whole operation, and Matthew Rothschild could not be happier about it. Relieved of responsibility for running the business side, he can concentrate on editing and writing and will remain an anchoring presence here. (Check out his piece on Obama's disturbing rewrite of World War I on Page 15.)

Lisa, as Matt says, is the most qualified person in America to take over leadership of The Progressive, Inc. She is brilliant, relentless, passionate, and deeply connected to the progressive movement nationwide. She started her career in the Office of Policy Development at the U.S. Department of Justice, then helped lead the administration of the federal court system, then was chosen as the chief counsel for nominations for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, where she vetted—and helped block—some of the Bush Administration's worst judicial nominees. She led the ACLU's national security lobbying against the Patriot Act's reauthorization and the NSA's spying on Americans before she moved to Madison to transform CMD into the turbo-charged investigative team it is today.

Lisa's passion is exposing and "fighting the bad guys," as she likes to say.

CMD's deputy director, Mary Bottari, will become the projects and investigations editor of The Progressive, Inc. Mary is a longtime friend of mine from both Madison and Washington, D.C. I knew Mary when she worked as a staffer in the Wisconsin legislature. When I became *The Progressive*'s Washington editor, Mary was Senator Russ Feingold's press secretary. She and I moved back to Madison and started our families around the same time. Mary was a powerful force in Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, and then, after the financial meltdown hit, she joined CMD to launch its hard-hitting research and reporting on the Wall Street "banksters," a term she helped popularize.

I will remain editor-in-chief of *The Progressive*. Our monthly magazine will maintain its beloved traditions and add some new features. On the web, we will continue to publish stories on progressive.org, along with ALECexposed.org, PRWatch.org, SourceWatch.org, and PublicSchoolShakedown.org.

Please join me in welcoming Lisa, Mary, and their impressive team, whom you will get to know in our pages and online in the coming months.

Time to open the champagne!

*—Ruth Conniff*

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**Subscription rates**: U.S. - One year $32; Two years $52; Canadian - One year $42; Two years $72; Foreign - One year $47; Two years $82. Libraries and institutions - One year (Domestic) $50; (Canadian) $67; (Foreign $98). Send all subscription orders and correspondence to: The Progressive, P.O. Box 392, Oregon, IL 61061. For problems with subscriptions, call toll-free 1-800-827-0555.

**The Progressive** is published monthly. Copyright ©2014 by *The Progressive*, Inc., 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703. Telephone: (608)257-4626. Publication number (ISSN 0033-0736). Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A. *The Progressive* is indexed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, Magazine Index, Alternative Press Index, Book Review Index, Environmental Periodicals Bibliography, Media Review Index, Academic Abstracts, Magazine Article Summaries, and Social Science Source. *The Progressive* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and on compact discs and other optical, magnetic, or electronic media from the H.W. Wilson Company, 950 University Avenue, Bronx, NY 10452. For permission to photocopy material from *The Progressive*, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Customer Service, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; (978)750-8400.

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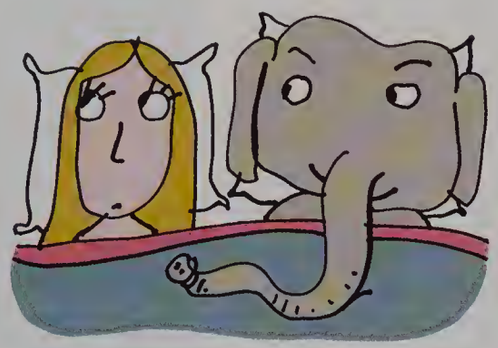
# No Comment

## Old Gripe about Public Ed

Republican state representative Andrew Brenner of Ohio wrote on March 3 that "public education in America is socialism." To defend his claim, he quoted the definition of socialism in Wikipedia as "a social and economic system characterized by social ownership of the means of production and co-operative management of the economy." And he concluded: "That seems to summarize our primary education system."

## Marital Sex, Republican Style



Conservative talk radio host Dennis Prager spoke at a pricey fundraiser for Senator Mitch McConnell in March. Back in 2008, Prager wrote a column, reports *Raw Story* and *The Hill*, where he gave his view of marital obligations: If "most women wait until they are in the mood before making love with their husband, many women will be waiting a month or more until they next have sex." He lamented that "we have witnessed the demise of the concept of obligation in personal relations. . . . To many women, especially among the best educated, the notion that a woman owes her husband sex seems absurd, if not actually immoral."

## Purging the Academy

Austin Ruse heads a group called the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute. On American Family Radio in March, he called gender studies a "toxic stew" and objected to "teaching people how to be sex-positive and overcome the patriarchy," according to Right Wing Watch. He denounced what he called the "hard-left, human-hating people that run modern universities," and he said they "should all be taken out and shot."

## Geraldo Rivera's Racial Politics

Geraldo Rivera on *Fox and Friends* on March 28: "Usually, the politicians who are robbing on the Democratic side tend to be ethnic politicians."

*Readers are invited to submit No Comment items. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give the name and date of publication. Submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned.*

## No Amen to That

Steven Anderson, a fundamentalist Arizona pastor, gave a stern sermon on March 23. He told the women of his congregation not to interrupt him with any amens, *Alternet* reported. He cited Bible verses to justify his position. Women are to worship "in silence," he said. He added: "First of all, it's not for a woman to be doing the preaching, and second of all, it's not for women to be speaking."

## College of Charleston Looks Backward

The College of Charleston recently chose South Carolina's lieutenant governor, Glenn McConnell, as its new president. McConnell, reports *Inside Higher Ed*, "used to own a shop that sold memorabilia of the South's rebellion; he appears in a widely circulated picture dressed as a Confederate general; and he is a longtime supporter of flying the Confederate flag on the statehouse grounds." In 2007, according to *Raw Story*, he went on a white-supremacist radio show, *The Political Cesspool*, whose mission statement says that its purpose is to espouse "a philosophy that is pro-white."

## Who Needs the Seventeenth Amendment?

Not Nevada's Sue Lowden, who lost her race for the U.S. Senate back in 2010 after she said you could barter for health care by bringing a chicken to your doctor. She is now running for lieutenant governor and says she'd "absolutely support" a move to end direct elections of U.S. senators, according to Nevada reporter Jon Ralston and *Talking Points Memo*. The Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1913 and championed by Fighting Bob La Follette, requires that Senators be "elected by the people."

## Equal Justice for Some

Robert H. Richards IV, who raped his three-year-old daughter, was sentenced only to probation after a judge ruled he would "not fare well" in prison, according to *The Huffington Post*. Richards, who lives off his inheritance and hired some of the best lawyers in Delaware, is the great grandson of Irenee DuPont, who headed the DuPont company.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STUART GOLDENBERG

# Letters to the Editor

## Durst Disappoints on Christie

I was disappointed in Will Durst's essay ("Christie, the Great White Whale") in the March issue. What was ostensibly about New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's corruption amounted to nothing more than one long, tiresome fat joke.

Is it Christie's size that makes him corrupt?

Or perhaps it is moral turpitude that makes him fat?

Neither is true, of course.

There are plenty of svelte politicians who are just as unethical, just as egotistical, and just as tyrannical.

I expect better from a magazine calling itself *The Progressive*.

*Carol Van Hulle*
*Via e-mail*

## Moyers for God

I love your publication on any level, and to feature our greatly underappreciated Bill Moyers (Interview by Peter Dreier, March issue) deserves the highest praise. Bill should be God, and if not, then at least President.

*Corine Sutila*
*Los Angeles*

## Props for Defending Public Schools

Props to Ruth Conniff for her clear public support (I just saw her on MSNBC) of the public schools. Likewise, I noticed that there is a good bit of writing by staff on the corporate underpinnings of the education "reformers." I think it is critical to continue your public education efforts to dispel the myth of the failure of the public schools.

*John Abramson*
*Via e-mail*

## Comic Books, Islam, and Voltaire

Am I the only person who noticed the irony? On the back cover of your April issue there's a picture of Taslima Nasrin, who, as everyone should know by now, is under a formal death sentence by Bangladeshi extremists for denouncing Islam.

Yet inside the magazine there's an article by Meher Ahmad praising the comic book industry for giving teenage Muslim American girls a superhero of their own: one who "questions her faith," no doubt, but probably not deeply enough to recognize the full moral implications of Islam's death for apostasy tradition.

To quote Mohammed, who purportedly said, "If one of you should leave the religion, kill him."

Comic books are more important than death sentences? Somewhere above Voltaire isn't smiling; he's doubled over in sarcastic laughter.

*Daniel G. Schaeffer*
*Saint Louis, Missouri*

## Thanks for the Reporting

I just signed up for a subscription and wanted to send a quick note to say thanks for all the great reporting. A lot of Americans need to wake up. Keep up the good work and keep educating.

*Mike Vondra*
*Via e-mail*

## Cheers for the New Look

Three cheers for the new design: open and clean and readable, very inviting, without any cuteness or catering to the digital age. But no letters to the editor? Was that a one-off? I hope so.

*Philip Dacey*
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*

*The Editor responds: When space is tight and letters are sparse, we may again leave them out. But our strong preference is to run your letters, so keep sending them to editorial@progressive.org or the old-fashioned way to 409 E. Main St., Madison, WI 53703.*

SLOWPOKE © Jen Sorensen

OBAMA'S SURGEON GENERAL PICK IS IN JEOPARDY BECAUSE THE NRA OBJECTS TO HIS SUPPORT OF BASIC GUN SAFETY MEASURES.
GUNS DON'T KILL PEOPLE — SAFETY LAWS DO!
ALL FUTURE NOMINEES MUST PASS AN INTERVIEW WITH THE NRA.
THE LACK OF GUNS IN AMERICA IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS.
NOT ENOUGH CONVICTION. NEXT!
AS SURGEON GENERAL, I'D DEVELOP A GUN GUIDE PYRAMID AND SET A RECOMMENDED DAILY ALLOWANCE OF AMMO.
GOOD, GOOD.
MAKE ME SURGEON GENERAL OR I'LL SHOOT YOU.
I THINK WE HAVE A WINNER!
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# *Brown v. Board* Sixty Years Later

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine, fundamentally changing the life of our nation.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision "ignited the spark of courage among the nation's forces fighting for equality of opportunity for all," The Progressive editorialized at the time.

Striking down segregation in America's public schools galvanized the civil-rights movement. But the decision itself was the result of years of struggle, hundreds of lawsuits, and savvy legal strategizing by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP.

In the end, ordinary citizens created "a contagious courage out in the country which penetrated the solemn portals of the nation's highest court," *The Progressive* wrote.

Despite that historic decision, and the huge impact it had on the country, more than 200 school desegregation cases remain open today, and segregation, on the whole, is getting worse. Black and brown children are more racially isolated than at any time in the last four decades, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund notes.

The new threat to public education is not just resegregation, but also an insidious movement to undermine public schools and abandon the children in them, especially the historically disadvantaged.

School closings, a "test-and-punish" model of education reform that invites the takeover of high-poverty districts by private companies, and the replacement of democratically elected school boards with "CEOs" are among the threats to the democratic institution of public education.

"We are, through charter schools, rolling back the *Brown* decision," says public education advocate and former assistant secretary of education Diane Ravitch. "That's wrong."

"The corporate elite plan a wonderful, creative education system for their own children, and militaristic, stripped-down schools for other people's children." says Karen Lewis, the dynamic leader of the Chicago teachers' union. "And then they have the temerity to call this system 'the civil rights issue of our time,' " Lewis adds, incredulously.

Cloaking the attack on public schools in civil rights rhetoric is a devious strategy.

The rightwing American Federation for Children, for example, pours money into state elections all over the country to elect Tea Party legislators and Republican governors with the aim of busting teachers' unions and promoting privatization schemes. In a 2012 report on its electoral successes to its membership, the group used the faces of little black and brown children to promote this new resegregation drive.

The racial politics of school privatization are agonizing.

Back in 1990 in Milwaukee, African American leaders, including Democratic state legislator Polly Williams, joined forces with Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, ALEC, and the conservative Bradley Foundation to launch the first voucher program in the nation, arguing that poor black kids deserve to get out of crumbling inner-city schools and get a better education at a private or religious academy.

It was a powerful argument.

Today, across the country, advocates for public funding for private schools continue to argue that low-income parents should have a choice, and should be able to send their kids to private school just like middle class parents.

But after twenty years, the voucher experiment has failed in Milwaukee. Results on statewide math and reading tests are worse for voucher students than for their public school peers. What's more, vouchers breed fly-by-night operators like the Life Skills Academy, which closed without warning in mid-December, leaving sixty-six students without a school. The company kept the tax dollars that covered those kids' tuition for the full semester, and the couple that ran it fled to Florida to open another voucher school.

The Department of Education's office of civil rights released a comprehensive report in March that found that black and Latino students are more likely to have inexperienced, low-paid teachers, and far more likely to endure harsh discipline and to be suspended, starting in preschool.

This problem is exacerbated by failed "solutions" that undermine public schools.

Polly Williams became disillusioned with the school-choice movement when it began pushing to expand the vouchers program to all families—not just low-income, minority kids.

"I knew from the beginning that white Republicans and rich, rightwing foundations that praised me and used me to validate their agenda would do it only as long as it suited their needs," Williams told *The Boston Globe* back in 1998.

"Please don't make it true that you were just using the poor to eventually make this available to the rich," former Milwaukee public schools superintendent Howard Fuller, another African American spokesman for "school choice," said at a budget hear-

**"Teachers are singled out as both the ultimate solutions to, and the biggest culprits for, our nation's education issues."**
**—*ColorLines***

ing in Milwaukee three years ago.

But that's what happened. The Wisconsin legislature lifted the income cap and expanded Milwaukee's voucher program into nearby Racine, where most of the families who received vouchers had never sent their kids to public schools at all.

The promise of public education is not that parents who are savvy enough to jockey their way into a private school should get a tax subsidy. The promise of public education is that any kid, from any family, can count on a free, high-quality education to become a full participant in our democracy.

That promise is at risk. Two separate systems of education are back.

Instead of two unequal school systems, one black and one white, we now have two systems—one public and one private—but funded out of the same diminishing pool of public funds.

Dale Schultz, a Republican legislator in Wisconsin, criticized his colleagues' plans to siphon tax dollars into private schools, even as they slash funds for public education.

"How conservative is that?" Schultz said recently. "We are trying to duplicate something we already can't afford."

RICHARD BORGE

Schultz objects to the generally sour tone toward teachers, and what he calls the "loose talk" that our public schools are "failing."

"Failing schools, hell," he said at a public forum. "Would you like to take me and show me in my district where the failing schools are?"

The corporate school-choice lobbyists who patrol the halls of the state capitol, along with their allies at rightwing think tanks, offend Schultz, and he denounced them, and his colleagues who do their bidding, as he retired this year.

Today's school segregation battle is as daunting as the battle that led up to *Brown* sixty years ago.

But the courage of activists who are determined to save their public schools all over the country is just as contagious.

In New York and Chicago and northern Wisconsin, parents, grandparents, and community members are waking up to the fact that their school—the beating heart of their neighborhood, their town, their civic life—is threatened by corporate lobbyists pushing vouchers and private charters and a competitive business model that spells doom for this great, democratic institution.

Activists from Seattle to Newark, from New Orleans to Milwaukee, and many other communities in between came together in Austin, Texas, in February at the first-ever gathering of the Network for Public Education to compare notes on their battles to save their local schools from privatization, over-testing, and closure.

Challenging the competitive "winners and losers" business model that is supplanting the great civic commitment to public education, Texas school superintendent John Kuhn put it this way: "Their weakness is not my strength, their poverty is not my wealth, and their pain is not my comfort. Their strength is my strength. Their richness is my richness. Their well-being is my well-being. We are in this together. And public schools are for all of us."

Karen Lewis joined Kuhn on stage at the University of Texas to give a barn-burning joint keynote address.

"There could not be two more different people on the planet," Lewis said. "John Kuhn is a white male. I am a black woman. John Kuhn has worked as a Christian missionary, and I am a recently bat mitzvahed Jew. John Kuhn is management. Karen Lewis is labor. But I am going to tell you that what we have in common are the values [that] make this country great."

Those values, Kuhn said, are why the Chicago teachers went out on strike, not for themselves, nor even for their students, but "to keep the fading light of democracy burning, and to fend off a new generation of robber barons."

Jitu Brown, a neighborhood organizer and activist on the South Side of Chicago, described the passionate community commitment to the struggle to save neighborhood schools, including one family sitting in at a Chicago school building slated for closure, even when the police came and sat on top of them.

"A movement is built by people who feel like that," Brown said.

This movement is for all of us—people of every race, town, and rural route.

As Brown put it: "When your baby or grandbaby goes out the door with that bookbag on, and you kiss that baby—at that moment, we're all the same." ◆

*—Ruth Conniff*

*by Mary Bottari and Friday Thorn*

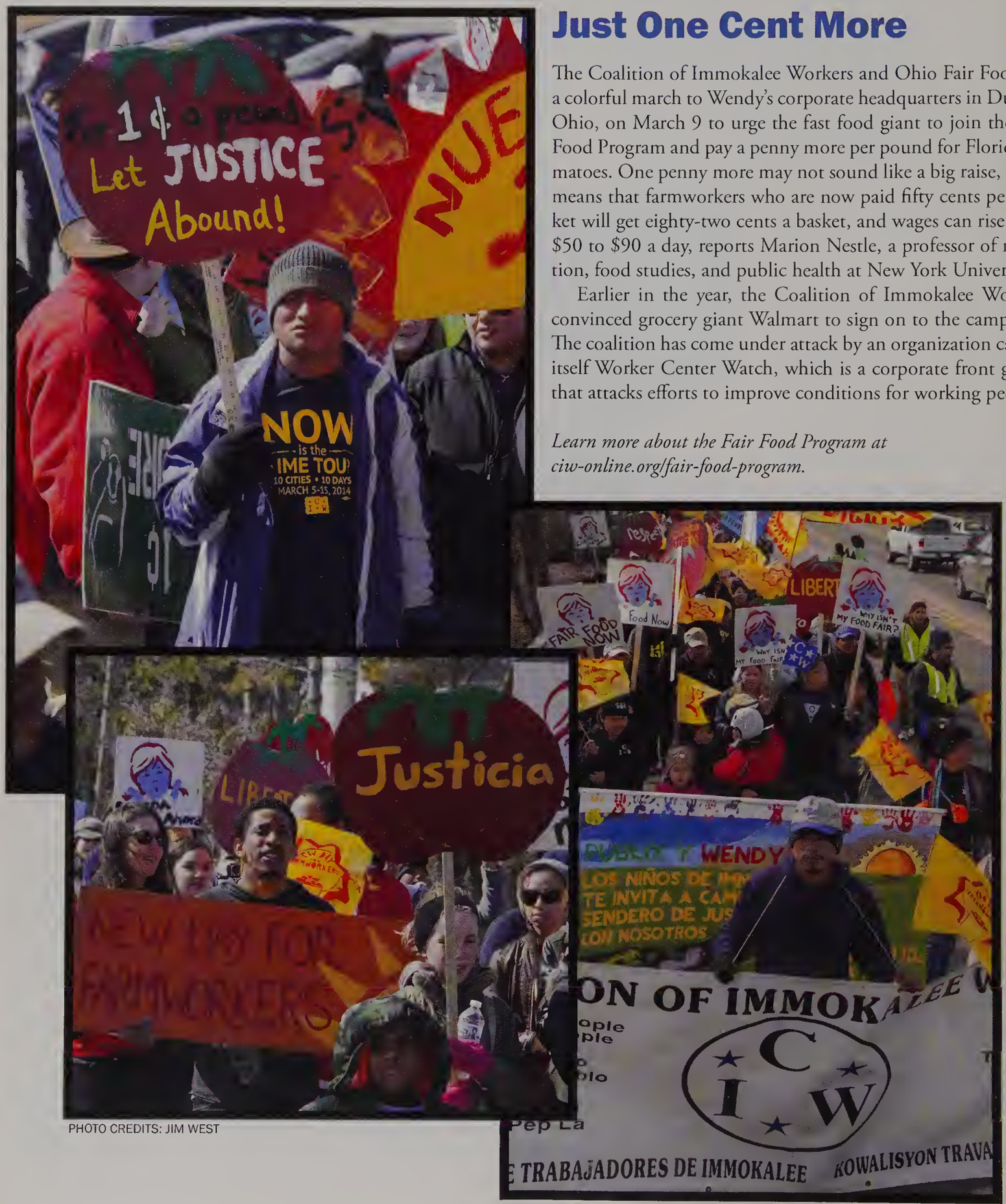



PHOTO CREDITS: JIM WEST

## Just One Cent More

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Ohio Fair Food led a colorful march to Wendy's corporate headquarters in Dublin, Ohio, on March 9 to urge the fast food giant to join the Fair Food Program and pay a penny more per pound for Florida tomatoes. One penny more may not sound like a big raise, but it means that farmworkers who are now paid fifty cents per basket will get eighty-two cents a basket, and wages can rise from $50 to $90 a day, reports Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University.

Earlier in the year, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers convinced grocery giant Walmart to sign on to the campaign. The coalition has come under attack by an organization calling itself Worker Center Watch, which is a corporate front group that attacks efforts to improve conditions for working people.

*Learn more about the Fair Food Program at ciw-online.org/fair-food-program.*

# Hamburgled? McDonald's Charged with Wage Theft

Workers, community leaders, and clergy protested in thirty-three cities from Raleigh to Los Angeles in March, calling on McDonald's to stop engaging in wage theft. The actions followed on the heels of class-action suits filed in California, Michigan, and New York alleging McDonald's is robbing employees by forcing them to work off the clock, shaving hours off their time cards, and not paying them overtime, among other practices.

A recent survey in New York showed that 84 percent of fast food workers encountered some form of wage theft.

"We work hard, and our wages are already impossible to live on," says Ashley Echevarria, a twenty-four-year-old mother of two, who works at McDonald's in Durham, North Carolina. She says she has to restock items after clocking out and doesn't get paid for that work.

"We need to get paid for every minute we work," she says, "and we're going to continue fighting until McDonald's takes responsibility for illegally stealing our hard-earned money."

A spokesperson for McDonald's said the company and its franchises "share a concern and commitment to the well-being and fair treatment of all people who work in McDonald's." She added that the company was investigating the allegations.

*Learn more at a new website Robbed on the Job: robbedonthejob.org.*

**Workers rally at a Chicago McDonald's.** PHOTO CREDIT: FIGHT FOR 15.

**Voters at a town meeting in Sharon, New Hampshire.**
PHOTO CREDIT: *MONADNOCK LEDGER-TRANSCRIPT*

# New Hampshire Says No to *Citizens United*

In March, forty-seven New Hampshire towns called for a constitutional amendment to overturn the *Citizens United v. FEC* Supreme Court decision. This comes after more than 100 New Hampshire residents followed in the footsteps of famed reformer Doris "Grannie D." Haddock, walking across the state in the dead of winter to show their support for campaign finance reform. Now the action moves to the state senate, where activists are hoping to pass a bill to create a committee to examine *Citizens United* and different approaches to a constitutional amendment.

*Learn more at Public Citizen: citizen.org.*

PHOTO CREDIT: JULIE DERMANSKY

# "Green Army" Defends Louisiana's Air and Water

A coalition of environmental and community groups are fighting to protect Louisiana's water, air, and soil from an industry busily destroying wetlands in the state. On March 8, the "Green Army," led by retired Louisiana National Guard General Russel Honoré, who mobilized the military response to Hurricane Katrina, held a Clean Water Festival on the steps of the state capitol in Baton Rouge. Honoré's foot soldiers were protesting a bill that would quash environmental lawsuits, such as the one recently filed by the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority, to hold the gas and oil industry accountable for destroying the state's precious wetlands.

*Learn more about the GreenARMY: gogreenarmy.com.*

On March 11, family members of inmates and other supporters rallied outside GEO's Northwest Detention Center.
PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX GARLAND

# Hunger Strikes Hit GEO Group

Detainees went on hunger strikes in March at two facilities of the GEO Group, the world's largest owner of immigration detention centers.

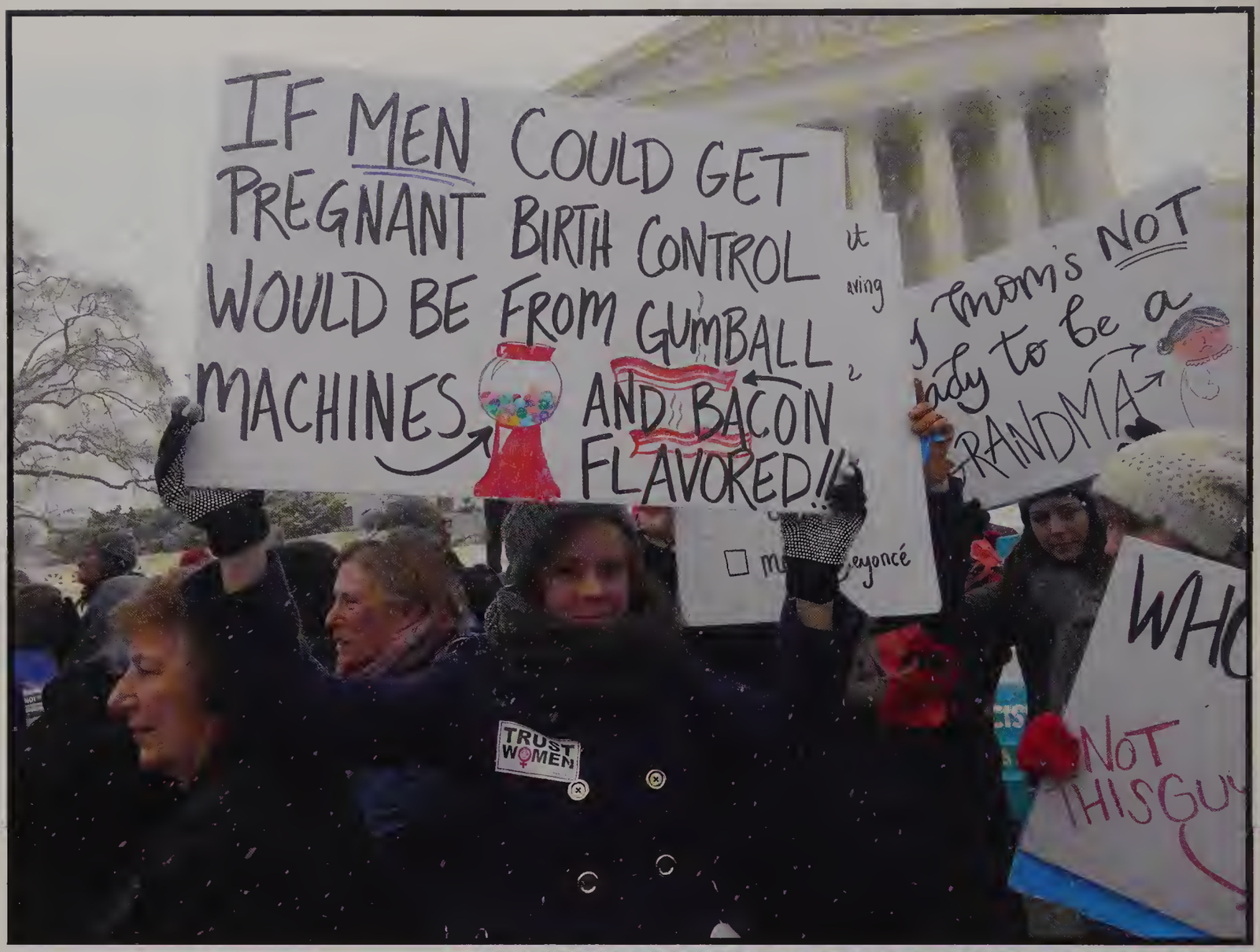
At the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, between 750 and 1,200 of the more than 1,300 detainees participated in the strike, which began March 7 and quickly spread to another GEO contract facility in Conroe, Texas. Strikers' demands included a halt to all deportations, which are tearing families apart, an end to crowding in cells, adequate food and medical care, affordable calling prices, and lower rates at the commisaries. GEO made $1.4 billion in revenue in 2012, and its CEO, George Foley, raked in $5.9 million in compensation.

When striker Ramon Mendoza Pascual was released from Tacoma, he encouraged the strike leaders imprisoned in Texas, "Don't be afraid. We must keep going, so that we are heard and so that we can be free."

Anti-deportation actions around the country, like this one, are having an impact and have forced President Obama to promise a change in policy.

*Learn more at notonemoredeportation.com.*

**"May God help you and may God keep you safe, because this is worth doing for our families. Just remember your families and that will give you strength."**
*—Hunger striker Jesus Gaspar Navarro, father of seven*




**Protesters in front of the U.S. Supreme Court on March 25.** PHOTO CREDIT: THINK PROGRESS

# Crafts or Contraceptives? Hobby Lobby Wants to Exercise Its Religious Freedom

On March 25, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* and *Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. v. Sebelius*. The cases deal with private corporations objecting to the contraceptive coverage mandate included in the Affordable Care Act. Both firms say they object to emergency contraceptives and IUDs on religious grounds. If they prevail, not only will the firms be able to dictate coverage options for their female employees, but many more corporations may start to "exercise" their anti-birth-control "religious freedoms."

The *Citizens United* decision in 2010 said that corporations were persons. And, as Lyle Denniston noted on his SCOTUSblog, "The First Amendment protects the rights 'of the people,' and [a] 1993 law protects the religious rights of 'persons.' "

Denniston asked: "Do profit-making companies qualify as either?"

*Learn more at Americans United for Separation of Church and State: www.au.org.*

# Obama Whitewashes World War I

President Obama went to Flanders Field in Belgium in March to pay homage to those who lost their lives in World War I.

But rather than use the occasion to point out the idiotic hideousness of that war, he whitewashed it, praising "the profound sacrifice they made so that we might stand here today."

He saluted the soldiers' "willingness to fight, and die, for the freedom that we enjoy as their heirs."

But this was not a war for freedom. It was a triumph of nationalism, pitting one nation's vanity against another. It was a war between empires for the spoils.

Historian Allen Ruff, who is studying the causes and effects of World War I, was not impressed with Obama's speech. "With Both NATO and the European Union headquartered in Brussels," Ruff says, "it would have been a true homage to the dead buried in Belgium 100 years ago if Obama spoke out against all major power imperial ambition, the true cause of so much slaughter then and since, rather than mouthing some trite euphemisms about the honor of dying for 'freedom.' "

But Obama insisted on repeating the very propaganda that fed that war. Without irony, he quoted the poem from John McRae that was used to encourage soldiers to sign up and civilians to pay for war bonds. Here's the verse that Obama cited:

*To you from failing hands we throw*
*The torch; be yours to hold it high.*
*If ye break faith with us who die*
*We shall not sleep, though poppies grow*
*In Flanders fields.*

Obama chose not to quote the great World War I poet Wilfred Owen, who was killed just days before the end of that most senseless slaughter. The title of his famous poem, "Dulce et Decorum Est," refers to the line that soldiers said on their way to the war, meaning, "How sweet and right it is to die for your country."

Here is the second half of that poem, where Owen describes a soldier next to him dying from an attack of poison gas.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

*In all my dreams before my helpless sight,*
*He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

*If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace*
*Behind the wagon that we flung him in,*
*And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,*
*His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;*
*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood*
*Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,*
*Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud*
*Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—*
*My friend, you would not tell with such high zest*
*To children ardent for some desperate glory,*
*The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est.*
*Pro patria mori.*

Yet there was Obama delivering that "old lie" with "high zest," and the obscenity of it should not escape us, even 100 years on.

For the soldiers Obama praised did not die for "freedom," but for something much more base.

They died for some of the same reasons U.S. soldiers died in the Iraq War. As Howard Zinn noted, ten years ago, "They died for the greed of the oil cartels, for the expansion of the American empire, for the political ambitions of the President. They died to cover up the theft of the nation's wealth to pay for the machines of death."

I only hope to live long enough to hear a U.S. President speak honestly about war. This one sure won't. ◆

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*Matthew Rothschild is senior editor of The Progressive.*

By Lisa Graves and Brendan Fischer
*Illustration by Jem Sullivan*

# Show Me the Money
## Meet the Multimillionaire Squeezing Missouri's Schools

You've probably heard of the billionaire Koch Brothers by now, and their sinister push to distort our democracy. But you may not have heard of Rex Sinquefield.

Unlike the Koch Brothers, who made their money the old-fashioned way, by inheriting it, Sinquefield is a self-made man, who earned a fortune in the stock market by investing in index funds.

He's a major funder of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), and he has also bankrolled the Club for Growth.

Though he was born in Missouri, he didn't move back there until 2005, after being away nearly four decades.

Now he claims to know how to "fix" the state. To an astonishing degree, over the last few years, Missouri's political landscape has been dominated by the wish list of just this one man.

Sinquefield is doing to Missouri what the Koch Brothers are doing to the entire country. For the Koch Brothers and Sinquefield, a lot of the action these days is not at the national but at the state level.

By examining what Sinquefield is up to in Missouri, you get a sobering glimpse of how the wealthiest conservatives are

*Lisa Graves is the publisher and president of The Progressive, Inc. Brendan Fischer is its general counsel.*

conducting a low-profile campaign to destroy civil society.

Sinquefield told *The Wall Street Journal* in 2012 that his two main interests are "rolling back taxes" and "rescuing education from teachers' unions."

His anti-tax, anti-labor, and anti-public-education views are common fare on the right. But what sets Sinquefield apart is the systematic way he has used his millions to try to push his private agenda down the throats of the citizens of Missouri.

Our review of filings with the Missouri Ethics Commission shows that Sinquefield and his wife spent more than $28 million in disclosed donations in state elections since 2007, plus nearly $2 million more in disclosed donations in federal elections since 2006, for a total of at least $30 million.

Sinquefield is, in fact, the biggest spender in Missouri politics.

In 2013, Sinquefield spent more than $3.8 million on disclosed election-related spending, and that was a year without Presidential or Congressional elections. He gave nearly $1.8 million to Grow Missouri, $850,000 to the anti-union teachgreat.org, and another $750,000 to prop up the Missouri Club for Growth PAC.

However, these amounts do not include whatever total he spent last year underwriting the Show-Me Institute, which he founded and which has reinforced some of the claims of his favorite political action committees. The total amount he spent on his lobbying arm, Pelopidas, in pushing his agenda last year will never be fully disclosed, as only limited information is available about direct lobbying expenditures. Similarly, the total amount he spent on the PR firm Slay & Associates, which works closely with him, also will not ever be disclosed. These are just a few of the tentacles of his operation to change Missouri laws and public opinion.

Even more revealing is how Sinquefield behaved when Missouri was operating under laws to limit the amount of donations one person or group could give to influence elections. In order to bypass those clean election laws, he worked with his legal and political advisers to create more than 100 separate groups with similar names. Those multiple groups gave more, cumulatively, than Sinquefield would be able to give in his own name, technically complying with the law while actually circumventing it. That operation injected more than $2 million in disclosed donations flowing from Sinquefield during the 2008 election year, and it underscored his chess-like gamesmanship and his determination to do as he pleases. (Sinquefield is an avid chess player.)

Shortly after that election, the Missouri legislature repealed those campaign finance limits, with his backing. Those changes benefited Sinquefield more than anyone. As a result, in 2010, Sinquefield made disclosed political donations more than ten times greater than what he spent in 2008.

**Sinquefield and his wife have spent at least $30 million on elections since 2007.**

His disclosed election spending reveals that he is focusing his efforts on remaking Missouri's legislature and laws. But in 2012 he did make some federal donations, including $1 million to the Now or Never PAC, plus $100,000 to Karl Rove's American Crossroads PAC, plus small sums to almost every Republican Presidential candidate that year. Sinquefield also gave money to some extreme Congressional candidates, including Michele Bachmann, Todd Akin of the infamous "legitimate rape" quote (after the other candidate Sinquefield backed lost in the primary), and Ted Cruz.

In Missouri, Sinquefield's strategy has been to focus on a few issues dear to him.

First, he spent lavishly to try to prohibit most cities in the state from imposing an income tax. He shelled out more than $11 million underwriting the "Let Voters Decide" ballot proposition in 2010, which won by a two-to-one margin. He spent about $8.67 a vote.

The proposition required Kansas City and St. Louis to hold a referendum on whether to keep the municipal income tax in 2011, and every five years after that. To Sinquefield's dismay, in April 2011, citizens voted overwhelmingly to keep taxing themselves, with 78 percent in favor in Kansas City and 87 percent in St. Louis.

But he hasn't given up.

Now Sinquefield is trying to do away with the 6 percent state income tax. Doing so would enrich him personally, since the investment firm he co-founded still manages more than $200 billion in investments, some of which he may still own. Plus, if the business is ever sold, he stands to make a windfall.

To help replace lost revenue from the income tax, Sinquefield favors an increase in the sales tax (and a broadening of it to include such things as child care). A study he commissioned also recommends increased taxes on "restaurants, hotels, cigarettes, and beer," while "shift[ing] the major tax burden from companies and affluent individuals," like Sinquefield. And it recommends selling off the public's assets, like the St. Louis airport, trading a short-term infusion of revenue in exchange for giving for-profit corporations access to decades of revenue.

He doesn't want an increase in property taxes. Can you blame him? He has a 22,000-square-foot house on an estate of hundreds of acres in the Missouri Ozarks, and another home in St. Louis worth at least $1.78 million, replete with a private elevator. He also owns a lot of cars, including a 2008 Bentley Continental Flying Spur that retailed for $170,000.

Sinquefield's taxation proposals would necessitate cuts in the state's provision of services many people take for granted as part of living in a modern,

civil society: public education, public libraries, and other public goods.

Sinquefield did not respond to a request for comment on this article.

Nowhere are Sinquefield's destructive intentions clearer than in his campaign against public education.

"I hope I don't offend anyone," Sinquefield said at a 2012 lecture caught on tape. "There was a published column by a man named Ralph Voss who was a former judge in Missouri," Sinquefield continued, in response to a question about ending teacher tenure. "[Voss] said, 'A long time ago, decades ago, the Ku Klux Klan got together and said how can we really hurt the African American children permanently? How can we ruin their lives? And what they designed was the public school system.' "

Sinquefield's historically inaccurate and inflammatory comments created a backlash from teachers, public school advocates, and African American leaders, who called it "a slap in the face of every educator who has worked tirelessly in a public school to improve the lives of Missouri's children."

The statement would be easy to write off as buffoonery if it didn't come from Sinquefield, who has poured millions from his personal fortune into efforts to privatize education in the state through voucher programs and attacks on teacher tenure.

The jewel in his privatization crown is the Missouri-based Show-Me Institute, a rightwing think tank that receives just shy of $1 million every year from the Sinquefield Charitable Foundation. Its tag line is a mouthful: "Advancing Liberty with Responsibility by Promoting Market Solutions for Missouri Public Policy."

Rex Sinquefield is the institute's president, and his daughter is also employed there (and spends her time tweeting rightwing talking points). The institute is currently led by Brenda Talent, the wife of former U.S. Senator Jim Talent.

For years, the institute has been laying the groundwork for radical changes to Missouri's education system, producing reports, testimony, and policy papers purporting to show the benefits of ending teacher tenure and enacting vouchers in the form of "tuition tax credits," along with other efforts to privatize education and undermine teachers' unions.

The Show-Me Institute does not act alone. It is a member of ALEC, and many of the education initiatives it promotes appear to have their roots in ALEC "model" legislation, such as tuition tax credits, parent trigger legislation, and attacks on union rights.

The Speaker of the Missouri House, Tim Jones, is a member of the ALEC Education Task Force and for many years has been the ALEC state chair for Missouri.

Sinquefield bankrolled Jones's 2012 campaign to the tune of $100,000. Not that Jones needed the money; he was running unopposed that year.

**Sinquefield owns a Bentley and two homes, including a 22,000-square-foot house. He opposes a property tax increase.**

Jones has made it clear he is an ally of deep-pocketed interests. He is quoted in ALEC's promotional materials as saying the benefit of ALEC is that "business leaders have a seat at the table."

Together, Jones and the Show-Me Institute—backed with Sinquefield cash, and using ALEC model legislation—have pushed an education privatization agenda in the state.

For example, Speaker Jones sponsored "parent trigger" legislation in both 2011 and 2012, bills that reflected the ALEC model "Parent Trigger Act." Parent triggers allow parents to vote via referendum to seize control of their public schools and fire the teachers and principal or privatize the schools. The Show-Me Institute provided outside support for the legislation, with a group's representative claiming that the bill "would expand the ability of parents to take an active role in the public education of their children."

Parent triggers are presented as a grassroots way to give parents control—and have been romanticized in the film *Won't Back Down*— but Diane Ravitch, an education historian and former U.S. assistant secretary of education in the first Bush Administration, characterizes parent trigger laws as a "clever way to trick parents into seizing control of their schools and handing them over to private corporations."

It doesn't end there. In 2008, the Show-Me Institute released a "policy study" titled "The Fiscal Effects of a Tuition Tax Credit Program in Missouri," and that same year, Jones introduced a tuition tax credit bill titled the "Children's Education Freedom Act," which reflected the ALEC "Great Schools Tax Credit Act." (Despite the Show-Me Institute study claiming to demonstrate that tuition tax credits would save the state money, the bill's fiscal note estimated the cost at $40 million.)

In contrast with traditional vouchers, where the state directly reimburses a private school for tuition costs, these "tuition tax credit" proposals—sometimes called neo-vouchers—offer tax credits to individuals and corporations who donate to a nonprofit "school tuition organization." The nonprofit then pays for a student's tuition.

The Missouri state constitution's strict separation of church and state requires that those seeking to privatize education do so via these neo-vouchers. Unlike the U.S. Constitution, the Missouri constitution bars the use of any public funds in support of religious institutions, including schools.

The appeal of neo-vouchers is that the funding for a religious school's tuition doesn't come directly from the state; it comes from the nonprofit "school tuition organization." Even though the nonprofits are funded by tax credits, proponents argue that neo-vouchers wouldn't violate the state constitution's

ban on taxpayer funds for religious institutions.

Having failed to fulfill their agenda in the legislature on the voucher issue, Sinquefield and his allies are now turning to the ballot initiative process.

At the end of 2013, a newly formed group called Missourians for Children's Education—backed with $300,000 from the Catholic Church, and with the support of the Show-Me Institute—began circulating petitions to put a tuition tax credit measure on the ballot this year.

The proposal would allow for a 50 percent tax credit for donations to scholarship-granting organizations, and up to $90 million in credits earned annually. Apparently in response to the failure of past tuition tax credit efforts, the proposal reserves 50 percent of the tax credits for organizations spending on public school districts, 40 percent for private and religious schools, and 10 percent to special education in either private or public schools.

"This one is deliberately appealing to [public school supporters]," James Shuls, an education analyst with the Show-Me Institute, told the Heartland Institute. "'Look, you're getting the bulk of these funds. This proposal might get opposition, but not as much opposition" as other privatization measures.

Sinquefield is also pouring some of his fortune into an effort to take tenure away from teachers.

"Can you think of any other occupation where you can screw up—and screw up children's lives permanently—and they can't fire you?" Sinquefield asked in 2012.

Contrary to the claims of the billionaires and millionaires, tenure doesn't guarantee a teacher a job; it instead guarantees that teachers have the right to due process. It protects teachers from being fired for political or personal reasons, and deters administrators from firing experienced (and higher-paid) teachers to replace them with less experienced (and less expensive) teachers, which might be good for the budget, but is usually bad for kids.

Republican legislators and Sinquefield-backed groups have long pushed "reforms" to tenure. But after years of legislative failures, Sinquefield and a group he funds, the Children's Education Council of Missouri, are now turning to a statewide ballot initiative.

In the last two years, Sinquefield has given at least $925,000 to teachgreat.org, which was organized to promote the teacher-tenure initiative petition. That initiative would require a constitutional amendment mandating a three-year limit on teacher contracts and requiring that teachers be "dismissed, retained, demoted, promoted, and paid primarily using quantifiable student performance data."

Teachgreat.org aims to collect 160,000 signatures to get the tenure measure on the ballot this year. Sinquefield also backed a similar ballot initiative two years ago that failed to collect enough signatures.

Incidentally, Missouri already has more stringent tenure standards than every other state besides Ohio. A teacher has to work for five years before becoming eligible for tenure; in forty-two other states, tenure can kick in after three years or less.

Harry Truman, Missouri's favorite son, once observed: "Wall Street, with its ability to control all the wealth of the nation and to hire the best law brains in the country, has not produced some statesmen, some men who could see the dangers of bigness and of the concentration of the control of wealth. . . . They are still using the best law brains to serve greed and self-interest. People can stand only so much, and one of these days there will be a settlement."

In Truman's own Missouri today, Rex Sinquefield epitomizes "the dangers of bigness and of the concentration of the control of wealth." Whether there will be a settlement is up to the citizens of the Show-Me State. ◆


LIFE AS ACTIVISM

JUNE JORDAN'S WRITINGS FROM THE PROGRESSIVE

Edited by Stacy Russo

Foreword by Angela Davis

Preface by Matthew Rothschild

Published by Litwin Books

$28.00

Available from Amazon

ISBN 978-1-936117-90-1

# The Sinquefield Follies:

## One Very Rich Man Wants His Way, and It's Threatening the Future of Missouri's Families, Schools, Economy, and Democracy

## *Who is Rex?*

**He's a multimillionaire chess master and the biggest political spender in the history of Mizzou.**

**He made millions as an index fund investor and now Missouri is his chessboard.**

**He has an extreme game plan that would roll back the clock to libertarian robber baron days.**

**He'll do almost anything to win. He once created 100 PACs to get around election laws.**

## He's distorting our democracy.

# WHAT REX WANTS

### His Million$ Not to Be Taxed as Income

**The corporation he founded is worth $220 billion. He'll make millions when/if it sells. He doesn't want to pay his fair share of income taxes to support the common good.**

### But No Bottom on Wages Paid to You

**His group claims any minimum wage, even $7.25 an hour, is too much.**

**Plus More Sales Tax, Too!**

**Instead of income tax, many things you buy would be taxed and that affects the amount in your pocket more than his.**

## It's really about GREED.

# Sinquefield's Schemes Will Sink Our Schools

**Vouchers.**

**Charter Schools.**

**Tanking Tenure.**

These are part of the privatization game plans funded by a handful of multimillionaires, like Rex. This strategy is designed to pit working people against each other over educational "choice," rather than truly invest in strengthening our public schools for all of our kids.

## Our Taxes Shouldn't Subsidize For-Profit or Religious Schools

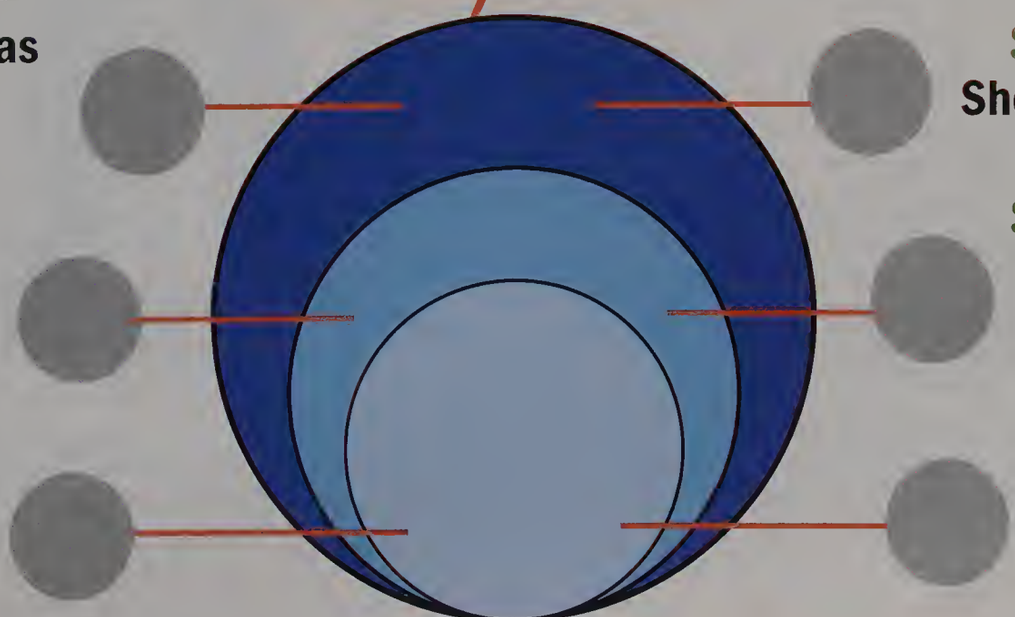
## How Rex Throws His Voice

**STEP 1** $ Creates a "stink tank," the Show-Me Institute, that manufactures reasons to change Missouri laws.

**STEP 2** $ Creates a lobby firms, Pelopidas, to Push Bills & Ballots and Hires a Big City Mayor's Cousin to Sling PR.

**STEP 3** $ Pays Huge Amounts of Money to Candidates, PACs, and Groups; he spent at least $3.8M in 2013 alone.

## "Rex, Inc."*



$??M
Pelopidas

$4.3M+
Show-Me Institute

$675K+
Children's Education Alliance of Missouri

$1.4M+
Club for Growth

$1.7M+
GROW Missouri

$975K+
Teachgreat.org

*That's just the tip of the iceberg!

By Jonathan Pelto
*Illustration by Sari Williams*

# Michelle Rhee Can't Clean Up Her Mess

Michelle Rhee is the patron saint of the corporate education reform industry.

Earlier this year, she tweeted:

*"Hey Twitter! I'm around for a little bit, anyone have any questions for me? Please use #AskMichelle—Michelle Rhee (@MichelleRhee)."*

And with that, Rhee stepped onto the social media stage only to fall face first into the orchestra pit.

Michelle Rhee's performance was an utter disaster. She was bombarded with questions about her role in the cheating scandal that took place when she was Washington, D.C., schools' chancellor, her recollections about taping children's mouths shut when she did a short stint as a Teach For America recruit in Baltimore, her role as education adviser for rightwing Florida Gov-

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*Jonathan Pelto is a blogger and advocacy journalist based in Connecticut. Pelto served as a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1984 to 1993. After leaving the legislature, he formed Impact Strategies Inc., Connecticut's first stand-alone issue advocacy company. He coordinates the education bloggers' network on publicschoolshakedown.org.*

ernor Rick Scott, and her connection to union-busting Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.

"Is it a coincidence that state policies you rank as best have terrible outcomes and are radically rightwing?" Twitter town hall participant @SamKnight1 asked Rhee.

"Do you think kindergarteners should take standardized tests?" asked journalist Sarah Jaffe.

"Why have you never come clean about the cheating scandal in DC?" chimed in @PrisonCulture. "You preach accountability, but take none."

"Do you feel any shame about using ideology rather than peer-reviewed research in your rhetoric?" asked NoMoreShrubs. And on it went.

Rhee responded by quickly exiting her own Twitter town hall. Her inability to defend herself says volumes about the whole test-driven "reform" movement.

Michelle Rhee burst onto the education "reform" scene as the shining figment of the imagination of businessmen like Rupert Murdoch, who infamously said, "When it comes to K-12 education, we see a $500 billion sector in the U.S. alone."

Before Rhee began her career promoting a political agenda that includes bashing teachers and teacher unions and spreading the gospel of failure in America's public schools to pave the way for the corporate takeover of public education, she put in a short and apparently psychologically challenging stint as a Teach For America recruit in the Baltimore school system.

Rhee says she signed up for Teach For America because she was moved by a PBS documentary on the organization. After her five-week training, she ended up at an inner-city school in Baltimore.

Rhee later wrote about her second year of teaching: "I wore my game face. No smiles, no joy; I was all thin lips and flinty glares."

"My mistake the first year was trying to be warm and friendly with the students, thinking that my kids needed love and compassion," Rhee wrote. "What I knew going into my second year was that what my children needed and craved was rigid structure, certainty, and stability."

As an example of her newfound focus, Rhee describes how she successfully created the appropriate classroom atmosphere by making her students line up and march four times into the classroom, until they got it right.

In a meeting, Rhee recounted how she responded to her rowdy students one day by putting little pieces of masking tape on their lips for the trip to the school cafeteria for lunch.

"OK kids, we're going to do something special today!" she said she told them.

Rhee said it worked well until they actually arrived at the cafeteria. "I was like, 'OK, take the tape off; I realized I had not told the kids to lick their lips beforehand. . . . The skin is coming off their lips and they're bleeding. Thirty-five kids were crying."

Rhee later claimed she was joking about what happened and, years later, thanks to the help of PR experts and some revisionist history, Rhee's biography highlighted her teaching experience as follows:

"Ms. Rhee's commitment to excellence in education began in a Baltimore classroom in 1992, as a Teach For America teacher. With the right teacher, students in urban classrooms can meet teachers' high expectations for achievement, and the driving force behind that achievement is the quality of the educator who works inside it."

By 1997, Michelle Rhee had found her true calling as a business executive in the growing corporate education reform industry. That year, Rhee founded the New Teacher Project, naming herself chief executive and president of this new entity created to "place more excellent teachers in classrooms across the country."

In 2007, Rhee was appointed chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools. According to her bio, in the course of three short years, Rhee was able to "turn around" the entire D.C. public school system.

Rhee's promotional materials boast, "Under her leadership, the worst-performing school district in the country became the only major city system to see double-digit growth in both their state reading and state math scores in seventh, eighth, and tenth grades."

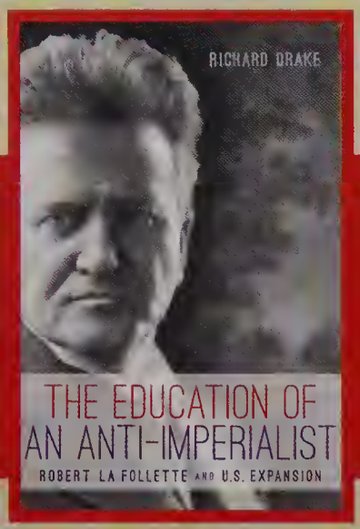
An iconic picture of Rhee with a broom on the cover of *Time* magazine captured the myth that she was sweeping away bureaucracy and bad teachers coddled by the previous administration, and giving the D.C. schools a fresh start.

But that was before revelations surfaced about a widespread cheating scandal that Rhee allegedly knew about but conveniently overlooked.

As the columnist John Merrow, who was once one of Rhee's biggest supporters, later wrote:

"Some of the bloom came off the rose in March 2011 when *USA Today* reported on a rash of 'wrong-to-right' erasures on standardized tests and the Chancellor's reluctance to investigate. With subsequent tightened test security, Rhee's dramatic test scores gains have all but disappeared. Consider Aiton Elementary: The year before Ms. Rhee arrived, 18 percent of Aiton students scored proficient in math and 31 percent in reading. Scores soared to nearly 60 percent on her watch, but by 2012 both reading and math scores had plunged more than 40 percentile points."

Merrow found and published a confidential memo from Rhee's own investigation of the cheating scandal that

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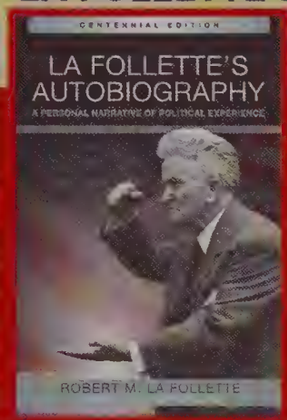


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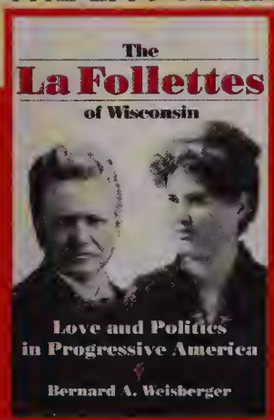


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shows that her own consultant told her that her principals, some of whom she hired, may have been responsible for the wrong-to-right erasures that inflated test scores, saved their jobs, and burnished Rhee's national reputation.

Rhee responded: "I don't recall receiving a report" on test erasures, and that other investigations "confirmed my belief that there was no widespread cheating."

But the report, marked "Confidential" and "Don't make hard copies and leave them lying around," clearly suggests widespread cheating by adults.

Rhee made much of her tough approach to improving test scores, firing teachers on camera who didn't make the grade, and promising that her no-excuses approach would work miracles in the D.C. schools.

Instead, she left D.C. in a shambles.

Rhee then pursued a national career as a spokesperson for dubious test-driven "reform" and now commands five-figure speaking fees.

Rhee formed StudentsFirst, Inc., an advocacy group based on the premise that "America's schools are failing our kids."

Today, StudentsFirst is primarily a public relations vehicle for Rhee as she pushes the public school privatization agenda.

In return for a fee as high as $50,000, Rhee tells audiences that America's schools are failing and that they can only be saved by demeaning public school teachers, disempowering teachers' unions, implementing the Common Core, dramatically expanding standardized testing, and siphoning public funds into privately run charter schools.

Rhee's personal strategy has been to present herself as a larger-than-life heroine. As part of the rollout of her campaign, Rhee claimed that she would be marshaling $1 billion to push her education reform and privatization agenda.

But in 2011, StudentsFirst raised only about $15.6 million, and her shadow corporation, the StudentsFirst Institute, raised another $12.9 million.

And while a major chunk of that money was spent on Rhee, her staff, and their media operations, much of the money was funneled to conservative anti-union politicians and secondary organizations associated with Rhee.

Of the funds collected, $2 million went to an organization called Parents

and Teachers for Putting StudentsFirst and $1 million to the Great New England Public Schools Alliance—the StudentsFirst front for New England.

During the same year, Rhee donated to about 200 different political candidates and committees around the country, including some of the most rightwing candidates seeking office. As Daniel Denvir wrote in Salon, "Ninety of the 105 candidates backed by StudentsFirst were Republicans, including Tea Party enthusiasts and staunch abortion opponents."

Rhee has been a close ally to former Florida governor Jeb Bush, as he has sought to use his anti-teacher, anti-union, pro-corporate education reform industry agenda to leverage his Presidential aspirations.

Rhee also played a key role for Florida Governor Rick Scott, whose website announced: "Michelle Rhee, founder of StudentsFirst, will continue to advise his office on education policy. Ms. Rhee served as a member of the Governor-elect's transition team for education."

Rhee was with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie at his State of the State speech and joined anti-union Ohio Republican Governor John Kasich at events promoting school privatization. Rhee also defended Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker in television appearances.

But if Rhee is a star on the rightwing talk circuit, she has failed to earn respect and credibility among people who care about education policy.

In October 2013, Michelle Rhee agreed to take part in a debate about education reform issues with Diane Ravitch, the nation's leading voice for public education. The debate was scheduled to take place on February 6, at Lehigh University.

Rhee then announced that a one-on-one debate was out of the question but she would join the debate if both she and Ravitch had a second person on each team. Ravitch agreed, only to be told a few weeks later that Rhee revised her demand and a third person would now be needed on each team or the debate was off.

**Rhee pulled out of a debate with Diane Ravitch.**

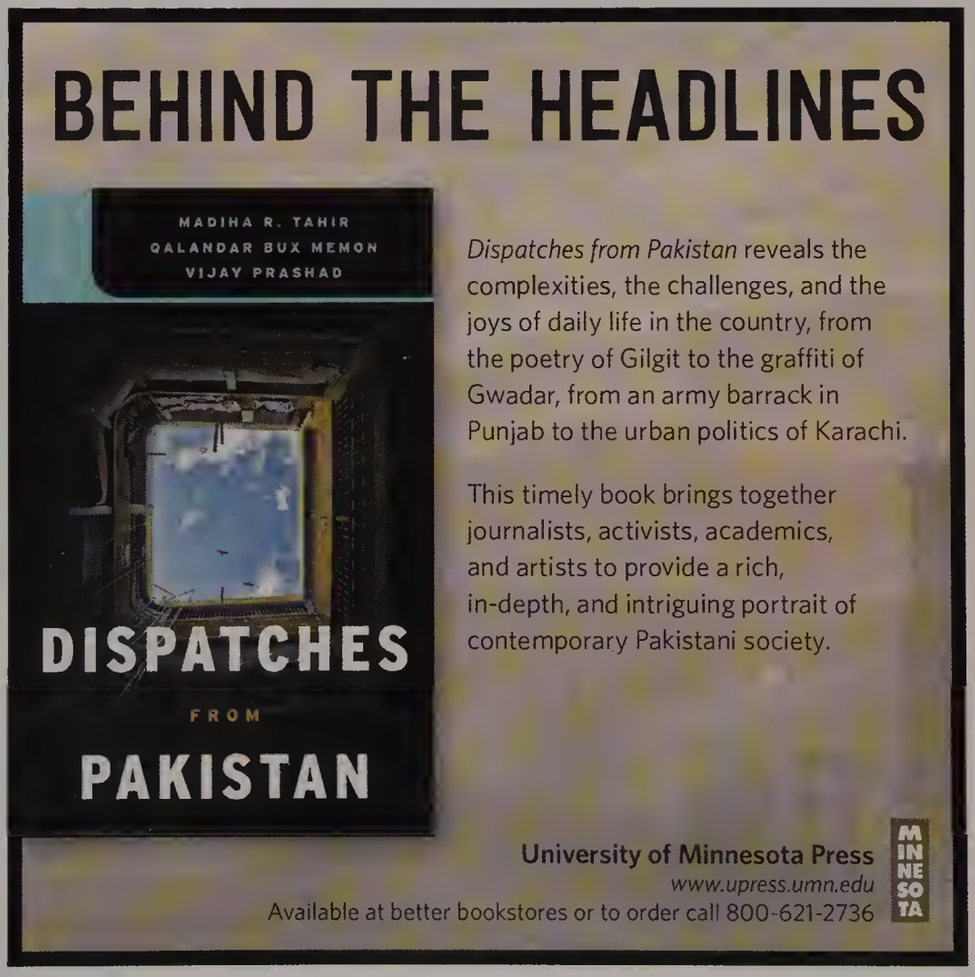
Again Ravitch acquiesced, picking Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg (a visiting scholar at Harvard) and Philadelphia parent activist Helen Gym to fill out her team.

But as final preparations were being made, Rhee's representatives announced that the debate was off because Rhee couldn't find a third partner for her team.

Instead, when February 6 came along, Rhee was in Minneapolis speaking to the local Chamber of Commerce and sharing her message that the Common Core, more standardized testing, ending teacher tenure, and privatizing public schools by handing them over to charter school chains will make America's public schools the envy of the world once again.

Like her retreat from her own social media meetup, her unwillingness to face Diane Ravitch shows that Rhee can't take the heat.

For the public face of the corporate education reform industry, the reality has become increasingly clear. There is simply no there, there. ◆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By Roger Bybee
*Infographic by Sari Williams*

# Corporate Tax Breaks Drive Student Debt

Tuition for students at public universities has more than doubled since 1987, leading to a crushing burden of student debt.

During the same period, the share of corporate income taxes as a portion of state revenues has dropped by 35 percent.

Large corporations have effectively blackmailed states into offering lucrative "incentive" packages to keep them from pulling up stakes and moving their plants.

The highly profitable Boeing, which made a whopping $3.9 billion in 2012, managed to extort a record $8.7 billion package from Washington State, while squeezing painful concessions on pensions from machinist union members in the state.

Nissan—also rolling in profits—managed to wring $1.33 billion out of Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation. Although it is benefiting from the largest incentives ever offered in the auto industry, Nissan is failing to live up to its obligation to provide well-paid jobs. A third or more of its Mississippi workers are "temps" who start at around $12 an hour.

Overall, corporate tax breaks are a bad deal from every angle. Greg LeRoy cited in his *The Great American Jobs Scam* a 2002 study that tax giveaways to corporations in one state "created only 9 percent of the jobs they had forecast."

Still, the flow of taxpayer dollars to big companies continues at a rate of about $80 billion a year at the state and local levels.

"Corporations pay an ever-shrinking percentage of overall taxes related to their wealth," says Scot Ross, executive director of One Wisconsin Now, "while investment in higher education and aid to middle class and lower income students plummets."

This sets up a downward spiral for a majority of Americans, Ross points out.

"Ordinary families not only have to pay more for public services because corporations are being let off the hook for a fair share," he says, "but they also have to pay more for higher education and training. And they go into decades of debt at the same time these same corporations benefit from the highly

---

*Roger Bybee is a Milwaukee-based journalist whose work has appeared in, among others, The Progressive, Z Magazine, Progressive Populist, Extra!, American Prospect, Isthmus, and In These Times, for whom he blogs on labor issues at workinginthesetimes.com. He also teaches labor studies at the University of Illinois. Bybee edited the weekly Racine Labor for fourteen years.*

educated, highly skilled, productive workforce."

Two-thirds of U.S. college students staggered under a debt load averaging $25,250 in 2010.

According to the One Wisconsin Institute's comprehensive national survey on student debt, unpaid student loans seriously reduce home and auto ownership among working adults.

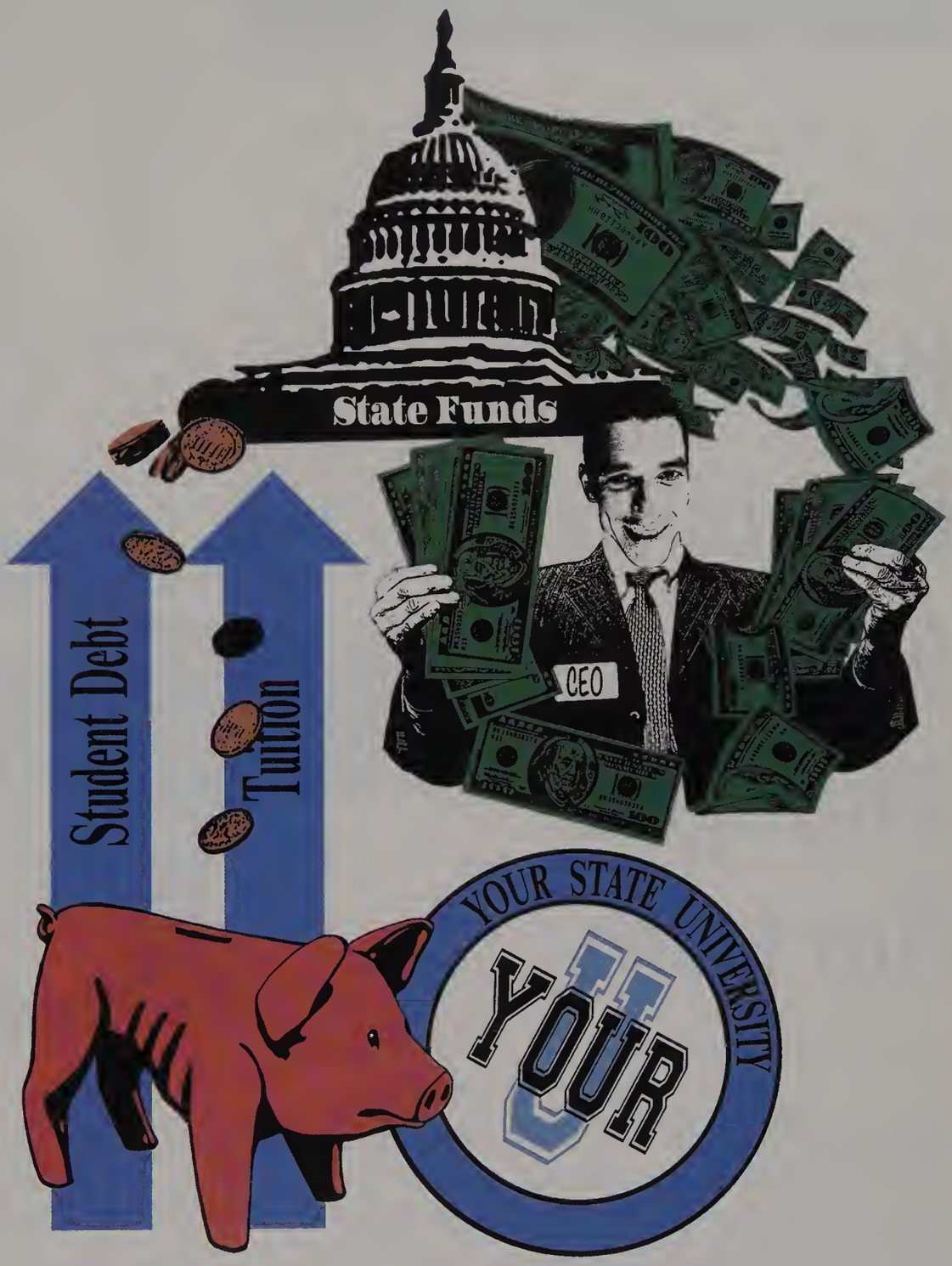
It now takes the average student loan debtor twenty-one years to pay off her college loans. Rates of homeownership are 36 percent lower among people still carrying student debt. And student loan debt accounts for $6.4 billion in reduced new vehicle sales annually, according to the report.

State after state has made meat-ax cuts to universities and technical colleges.

In Wisconsin, where two-thirds of corporations now pay no state income taxes at all, under Governor Scott Walker and the Republican state legislature, students have endured a 30 percent cut to technical colleges and a $200 million tuition increase over four years for the University of Wisconsin system schools.

For many of these students, job prospects will remain bleak as the very corporations so richly "incentivized" to generate jobs here prove to be far more inclined to be "job creators" in China, Mexico, and India. ◆

**Raiding the Dome, Wrecking the Ivory Tower**



FIRST PERSON SINGULAR
*by Mike Ervin*

# How Disability Activism Changed Our Lives

ASHLEY HOLT

A red, white, and blue Chicago Transit Authority bus eases to a stop on the corner. The doors fling open. The people huddled under the shelter climb onto the bus, single-file and solemn. But there's a mad dash coming from across the street, as a dozen or so additional pedestrians hustle to catch the bus before it pulls away. They wave their arms at the bus driver. Among these pedestrians is a man in a motorized wheelchair. He zips full speed across the street. His chair bounces over dips in the asphalt like a hovercraft bumping over choppy waters.

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*Mike Ervin is a Chicago-based writer and a disability-rights activist with ADAPT (www.adapt.org). His blog, "Smart Ass Cripple," appears at smartasscripple.blogspot.com.*

Happy ending: All the pedestrians manage to catch the bus. The man in the wheelchair is the last to board. The driver flips a switch and a ramp is deployed from the front door of the bus. The man rolls in. The doors close. The bus pulls away.

I see this scene, and I laugh. It may not be funny to anyone else, but I remember thirty years ago. Chicago buses were green behemoths back then and in a fleet of more than 2,000 not one was wheelchair accessible. Thirty years ago, in April 1984, I became an activist when I joined others in the first action of the Chicago chapter of the disability rights group ADAPT. On that day, we occupied the meeting room of the transit authority's board of directors and presented our demand that all buses purchased from this day forward be equipped with lifts for wheelchair access. Chicago ADAPT used street actions and a lawsuit to battle the hostile boards of the Chicago and regional transportation authorities.

This is why I laugh.

Today, every Chicago bus has a simple ramp that makes it wheelchair accessible. But back in the 1980s, the public transit boards and the newspaper editorial boards predicted there would be great chaos if wheelchair users were ever allowed on the bus. One regional transit authority board member said of Chicago ADAPT, "We're faced with a minor group of zealots who are prepared to cost us millions for their own purposes. They've got to be stopped." A Chicago Tribune editorial dismissed our demand for access as "impractical" and called us "a militant faction of the city's handicapped community."

How ridiculous.

The first chapter of ADAPT was born in Denver after Independence Day in 1978.

A plaque placed on Colfax Avenue between Broadway and Lincoln Streets in downtown Denver reads: "On July 5 and 6, 1978, this intersection was the site of the first demonstration for wheelchair accessible public transportation. Nineteen members of the Atlantis Community chanting, 'We Will Ride,' blocked buses with their wheelchairs, staying in the streets all night. Twelve years later, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed by the United States Congress and signed by the President on July 26, 1990, ordering all public buses wheelchair accessible."

The Gang of 19 action happened a few weeks after I graduated from college. In Chicago at that time, wheelchair users were still living in a dark age known as the medi-car era. Our lone "public" transportation option was to call a medi-car, which was a pseudo ambulance. A medi-car ride cost more than a limo ride. It was usually covered by Medicaid but only if the trip was for medical purposes. If we just wanted to go to a movie or something, we were SOL. I was fortunate that my mother had a lift-equipped van, so I wasn't at the complete mercy of medi-cars, like so many others who used wheelchairs.

In 1981, in response to new federal rules requiring public transit administrators to make a meager effort to provide wheelchair accessible options, the Chicago Transit Authority launched a separate door-to-door operation called Dial-a-Ride. I signed up right away. It sounded like sweet music to me. I was a young man in the big city. I couldn't drive my mother's van, and I didn't want to always rely on friends and family to chauffeur me. Sometimes I just wanted to go places on my own. Now I could call and have an accessible vehicle dispatched right to my door to whisk me directly to wherever I wanted to go. Awesome!

Of course, it was too good to be true. There was no spontaneity because rides had to be reserved at least a day in advance. Service hours were limited. On weekends it was only 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Quite often, I couldn't get rides at the time I requested, if at all. And I never knew how long it would take to get to my destination. Several other passengers might be picked up and dropped off along the way, turning a short jaunt into a long excursion. For a very brief time, riding Dial-a-Ride was liberating. But it soon became demeaning. Dial-a-Ride became Dial-a-Headache. It was very separate and very unequal.

And then I heard about the Gang of 19 and about ADAPT and their wonderfully confrontational tactics. My friend Kent Jones, a man with multiple sclerosis who used a manual wheelchair, went to Denver in the fall of 1983 to participate in an ADAPT protest action. Kent was a brilliant, radical thinker. He was a civil engineer who designed sewer systems. He had a buzz cut. He always wore a white dress shirt, dark pants, and a thin, muted tie.

Kent returned from Denver with tales of a faraway land where wheelchair users rode public buses freely—no advance reservations, no curfews, no surprise circuitous routes, none of the hassles of Dial-a-Ride.

Hearing all this made me angry both at the system in Chicago and at myself. Every other major city had tried offering mainline buses to people with disabilities. But all we were offered was a barebones joke of a transit service. Take it or leave it. It was insulting. If mainline Chicago bus service was as unpredictable and unreliable as Dial-a-Ride, the riders would revolt. I felt foolish that, until that moment, it never crossed my mind that I had a right to equal access to my city's public transportation. Being excluded had become a natural part of life for me and for many other people with mobility disabilities.

But I also felt hope. I didn't have to put up with being a Dial-a-Ride cap-

tive. We could have accessible mainline buses here if we organized and protested in the style of ADAPT.

I remember a pack of us Chicago ADAPTers invading a transit authority board meeting in 1984. When the meeting began, we broke out New Year's Eve noisemakers. Combined with our chanting, there was such a racket that the chairman recessed the meeting and the board members left the room. We then moved in and took the board members' places at the empty board table. We removed their nameplates from the table and replaced them with our homemade nameplates. With a pounding of the abandoned gavel, we called to order the first meeting of the People's Chicago Transit Authority Board and we unanimously passed an ordinance requiring all new buses to be lift-equipped. The meeting adjourned. It was great theater for the assembled media.

I remember later that year a group of us blocking a downtown intersection on State Street. We chained our wheelchairs together. Police came and lifted us, motorized wheelchairs and all, into paddy wagons.

Confrontations like these continued for the next four years. During that time, the transit authority board voted twice not to equip new buses with lifts. Meanwhile, the discrimination lawsuit against the authority went to trial. Many Chicago ADAPTers testified. On Martin Luther King Day 1988, Judge Patricia Patton ruled in the case of *Jones vs. CTA* that by having no accessible buses, the Chicago Transit Authority violated the state human rights law.

ADAPT held a celebratory press conference that day, where we drank champagne. The *Chicago Sun-Times* ran an editorial that read, "Champagne was uncorked this morning in celebration of a finding that the CTA should equip its buses with lifts. But taxpayers and other riders will not be toasting this decision. . . . Imagine CTA drivers on packed routes . . . trying to keep to the schedule, maneuvering their buses close enough to the curb to board a wheelchair user, and then finding room for the wheelchair user on the standing room-only buses."

The next time the Chicago Transit Authority board met, the members voted six-to-one to purchase 570 buses with lifts. But then the regional board voted unanimously to block the purchase unless the lift requirement was removed. This mean-spirited obstructionism was spearheaded by then-board chairman Samuel Skinner, who would become Secretary of Transportation for President George H. W. Bush.

Chicago ADAPT turned our full protest energy toward Skinner. We hung a cardboard effigy of him at an RTA board meeting. By summer's end, the board relented and ordered Chicago's first fleet of accessible buses. The first lift-equipped buses hit the street in 1992.

The man in the wheelchair zipping to catch the bus is far too young to remember the medi-car or the Dial-a-Ride days. He's probably even too young to remember the clunky lifts of the 1990s that hoisted people in wheelchairs to the top of the steps on the front entrances of buses. Today's buses don't even have entrance steps. The front door threshold is flat and curb-high. All that's needed to roll aboard is a ramp.

What would that man in the wheelchair say if he heard that this routine ride he takes every day was once so unthinkable to those in charge that it took lawsuits, protests, and arrests to break down their resistance? Today, his exclusion would be unthinkable.

It's not just policies that changed over the last thirty years. The culture has changed.

If someone told him how things used to be, I hope he would laugh. I hope he would find it all completely ridiculous. ◆


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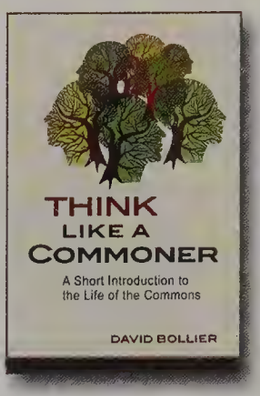


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*by Ruth Conniff*

# George Lakoff

George Lakoff is the nation's leading expert on linguistic "framing" in politics. The author of *Don't Think of an Elephant! The Political Mind*, and *Whose Freedom?* he advises Democrats and progressives on how to recapture the rhetorical high ground by speaking in the emotionally resonant language of values.

I spoke with Lakoff while he was in Wisconsin in March to help progressives here create what he calls the Wisconsin Progressive Freedom Project.

Lakoff followed the Wisconsin uprising from his home in Berkeley, where he is a distinguished professor of cognitive science and linguistics.

"I was really inspired by the protest movement at the capitol," he says. "I wrote a piece about it on my blog, and apparently it was printed out and posted on the capitol wall, which won my heart."

In Wisconsin and around the globe, progressives are up against what Lakoff calls "the conservative communication system."

"I've been fighting that system for fifteen years," Lakoff says. "Most people don't even know that it exists."

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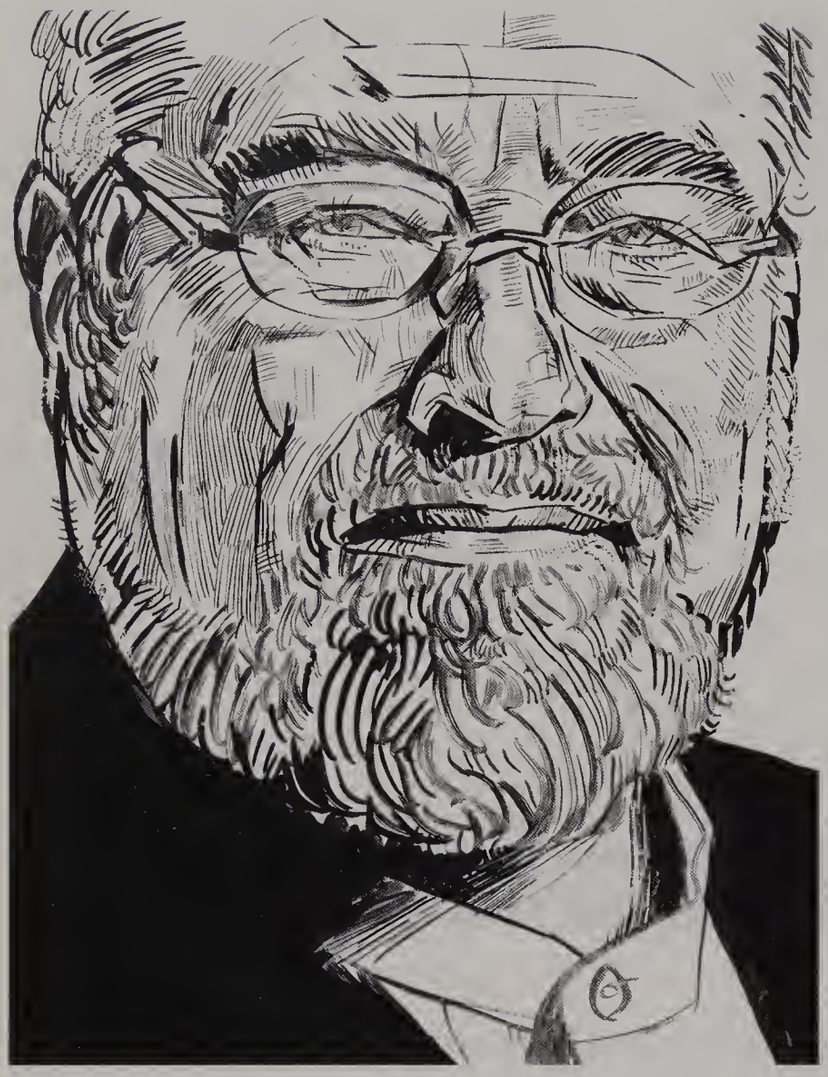
*Ruth Conniff is editor-in-chief of The Progressive.*



JOHANNA GOODMAN

"When Republicans went to college and studied business, they took a course in marketing and found out how people really think," he adds.

Progressives need to take a lesson from that, he says. So when a group of Wisconsinites from labor, environmental, and civil rights groups approached Lakoff, he happily began working with them to try to help frame a cohesive, winning message.

I spoke with him while he was in the midst of a series of workshops and lectures. We sat down for more than an hour at a lunch table in the cafeteria at Wisconsin Heights High School in Mazomanie, where the Wisconsin Grassroots Network was holding its annual festival. He talked about his theories, about Democratic "wimpiness," about his classic idea that the conservative "strict father" family values clash with the progressive "nurturing parent" worldview, and, with tears in his eyes, about his own father and how his parents shaped his view of life.

Lakoff exudes warmth. He cracks jokes, listens deeply, and answers questions thoughtfully and with respect. I watched him handle agitated questioners gently and with great good humor. In that way, he seems to embody his own political philosophy—that by thinking about our common values, which are progressive, optimistic, and humane, we can bring out the best in each other and forge a more hopeful future.

**Q: Listening to you I hear this very appealing message about a less harsh view of the world. It seems a lot of people might be open to that, particularly as they imagine themselves falling on hard times.**

**George Lakoff:** Well it's not just as they imagine themselves falling on hard times. Right now, people are afraid of a lot of things, if not for themselves then for their kids, and for the world, and for their communities. The fears are real. Fear is a huge motivator.

But hope is a stronger motivator than fear. Obama understood that. So the question is, where do you give the hope? The answer is you explain what the other side has done, and that you can do it better.

See, people think it's all the Koch Brothers. It's not all the Koch Brothers. The Koch Brothers could have all the money they want. If they don't have their spokespeople, they've got nothing. Right?

You've got tens of thousands of people going into the Kochs' leadership institute every year, and then going out and being spokespeople. They do it through individual people. Progressives don't appreciate how much conservatives have used individual people.

**Q: How do you think your work in Wisconsin is going?**

**Lakoff:** It is wonderful, first of all, to see people getting it. It is so much better here than in Congress. Look, I mean, I love the people in Congress. But a lot of them don't get it. They're educated with Enlightenment reason. They want to talk about the facts. They're very good at it. They are good at it every day of their lives. And they just don't get the problem with it.

**Q: There's almost a snowball effect as the Right sets the terms of debate, in that the worse the problem is, the more people hesitate to try to do something different. You use the word "wimpiness" to describe mainstream Democrats.**

**Lakoff**: Well, there's a fear of getting beaten up. And they will get beaten up if they don't know what to do.

A lot of progressives think conservatives are greedy or mean

or stupid or cruel. But 95 percent of them just have a different worldview. A majority of them are poor. It's a strict-father morality. That's why you hear people argue that they wouldn't pay for someone else's health care, even if it means their own health care costs would go down. That's their morality. We have to understand that.

Folks who voted for Scott Walker, a lot of them are poor. They are not ogres. They need to be set free. A lot of them need health care. They don't know what freedom means.

To speak to them, you have to be aware of their values.

The hope is the people who are biconceptual—who have both progressive and conservative values. We can speak to their progressive values.

People often tell me they are going home for a holiday and they are dreading talking to their rightwing grandfather. "We always have the same argument," they say. I say, why don't you ask your grandfather, "What are you most proud of that you have done in your life to help other people?" Invariably they will come back and say, "My grandfather is an arch-conservative, but he's done three good things in his life." Those things are based on a progressive worldview that he partly holds. The more he talks about that, the stronger that gets in him.

People already have your moral worldview. Speak to that. Make it stronger.

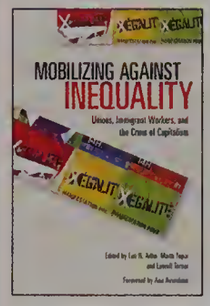
It's important to remember that you have neighbors. The stronger your ties, the more you will be able to convince them, slowly.

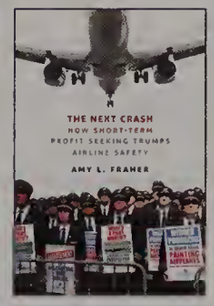
You need to undermine the opponent's discourse. You don't attack him by saying he is too powerful or too rich or he controls the legislature too much. That helps him.

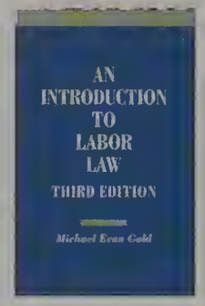
If Scott Walker's opponent is talking about job creation—even to say he hasn't created jobs—that's helping Scott Walker. He owns that idea. There is another thing Mary Burke [Walker's Democratic opponent] could talk about, and that's the fact that working people are profit creators. She could use her own experience in business to talk about employees creating profits for her. I doubt that she would do it. She prides herself on being a "job creator"—I help these people by giving them jobs. No. They give me money. And not only that, I wouldn't give them any jobs if they didn't give me money.

Imagine Mary Burke saying that. Imagine the numbers of working people saying, "Oh my God, what's going on?" She could change the discourse. There would be all sorts of attacks. And every time she was attacked, she could say it again and reach more working people.


*Social Movements and Worker's Rights from Cornell*



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FOREWORD BY ANA AVENDANO

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**Q: This moment in Wisconsin is really profoundly urgent for those of us who are living it.**

**Lakoff**: It's not just Wisconsin. It's not just national. It's international. It's there in Denmark. You have the socialist parties ruling Denmark putting in conservative policies because the conservatives control the media and public discourse.

It's there in France. It's already taken over Hungary. It's there all over Europe. It's just a terrible thing that's going on. It's taken over the world.

**Q: Yet at the same time things look completely bleak, there is a revival of the kind of understanding that gave birth to *The Progressive* in the early 1900s.**

**Lakoff**: Exactly. I agree.

Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and he is us." There's a deep truth in it. If you can find what it is within you that makes you correctly disgusted with this, and you can articulate that, and you can get other people to articulate it by the tens of thousands, you win.

**Q: The battle over public schools is another place where it seems possible to reach these folks you talk about who have both progressive and conservative impulses because the whole idea of a public school system is hanging in the balance now.**

**Lakoff**: It's true everywhere. See, the word "privatization" does not point out the destructive aspect of it. "Privatization" sound pretty much OK. So it's private, that's good. What's wrong with private?

Well, the problem is that the private depends on the public, and if you destroy the public, you ain't got the private.

And if you destroy the public schools, not only are you destroying the people in them and the children, you are destroying a crucial part of society. You are going to have people who are not fulfilled in life, who don't have the skills and who are not going to be able to advance the society and create progress, and they are not going to be citizens. It's a tragedy in every way from the point of view of freedom. You say, "Oh, we are going to give parents choice." But what they are doing is taking freedom away from others.

It's subtle. But it's only subtle because people never thought of it that way. They don't think of education as freedom.

**Q: Here we are, as always, in the short-term election cycle, with the urgency of possibly losing the Senate, taking more losses in the House, and facing tough battles in the states.**

**Lakoff**: Let me just go through a major problem: Everybody who is elected to office at the level of Congress, and probably the state level, too, they all have what is called a "team."

And the "team" is run by an ad agency. If someone wins, they want their team to do the same thing that got them elected. If someone loses, they're not there, so it doesn't matter. So there is no reason for them to change, at all. There was a point at which I realized this, when I started talking to people about who their strategists were and how it worked. I went to the people who were the strategists in the companies and said, "Hey, do you want someone to work with you on this, this, and this?" And they all said, "No, no. We have our own people. And not only that, we have to do exactly what we did before."

So you look at that and you say, "Ah, this is a constraint on our democracy."

You can't blame the candidate for saying, "Do what you did that got me into office." But it's devastating, given the situation.

The Democrats have six or seven major polling companies. And they control the polling.

What's wrong with that? Well, there's a lot that's wrong with that. Polling creates an artificial center when there is none. Polling creates something that's not real. So why do people think there's a center? There's a metaphor, left to right, so there ought to be a center. But the polls always create it, artificially.

So how do the polls create something that's not true? The answer is very interesting.

First, they use language that everyone understands, which is mainly the language that is already in public discourse, which is mainly Republican language.

Second, they are based on demographics. And they use statistics. Now this is a disaster, for the following reason: Statistics always gives you a bell curve, and the bell curve always has a middle. So it artificially creates a middle when there isn't one.

**Q: So the politicians spend all their time going after the nonexistent voters in the nonexistent middle?**

**Lakoff**: Not only that, they move to the right and say, "If we talk to people, we should communicate with them where they are, so if they are rightwing, we're going to talk rightwing." Which is, of course, hurting themselves and all the rest of us.

**Q: What were your parents like?**

**Lakoff**: My mom was a very tough lady. She worked in a factory for twenty-five years from the age of twelve, when it was

six days a week for $3 a week, ten hours a day. Then she married my father, and they were very poor. And then he got sick, and she wound up running a rooming house in Bayonne, New Jersey. She washed toilets and washed steps down and cleaned up, and every Friday when the roomers came in with their paychecks she was out there making sure they paid their room rent before they got drunk.

She could outcurse any sailor. And she did. So she was tough. And, if necessary, she could be very mean. She knew the admiral at the Navy base, so if one of the sailors knocked up his girlfriend, there was a wedding arranged very quickly. My mother was a matron of honor in many weddings that took place in our house.

**Q: Was she the strict father?**

**Lakoff**: No, she wasn't. My mother also had problems because she got mad hatter's disease. She was working in a hat factory, and she got mercury poisoning. So she would be ill part of the time.

And that was very difficult. She was extremely loving, but also a little bit off because she was often sick.

She was really strong. And quite a remarkable person. She taught me how to read, write, and do arithmetic when I was three, by using the comics. She would give me jobs to do, like, when I was four, going to the grocery store and learning all the prices and then checking the addition, which was done on bags (this was before there were adding machines). I was given a job to do to help her. So I helped her. And when I was five and six I would go off and do some shopping on Sundays. The idea was you raise children to be competent and to be able to help, because children want to help. She knew that.

**Q: Is that a nurturing parent philosophy?**

**Lakoff**: Absolutely. You bet. It's a nurturing parent philosophy. It's not something that says, "I want you to do this or I'll beat you up." You say, "I need your help, can you help?" And they help.

And you give them things to do you know they can do. And you make them feel good.

**Q: What put you on the path to where you are now?**

**Lakoff**: My parents. My parents never had a chance. They were both brilliant people in their own ways. Neither of them went to high school. My father was incredibly astute and self-educated. He read *The New York Times* cover to cover every day and taught me to do that when I was about ten. And he wrote letters to the editor, which we didn't know about until after he died.

My brother, who is ten years older, wrote an obituary for him for the local paper when he died. And on a lark he sent the obituary to *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* wrote back, asking for my father's picture.

My father was a clerk in an office, and before that had worked in a slaughterhouse. And then he was sick for some years before he died. He had a lot of odd jobs on the side. So why would they ask for his picture? It turned out, he was their favorite letter writer. We didn't know.

**Q: Do you feel like your compassion for working people comes from your family?**

**Lakoff**: Oh, absolutely.

**Q: Did your parents have those politics, too?**

**Lakoff**: They sure did. Absolutely. But it's not just compassion for working people. I have a chance to do something that my parents didn't. So I'm going to do it. Period.

**Q: It's tremendous work, and it really goes right to the heart of what matters.**

**Lakoff**: But it's also the academic work I'm doing. For years I didn't do political stuff. I was studying grammar. I was studying semantics. I was trying to understand how people thought. I was trying to figure out how metaphor worked. And then there was a point at which I realized it had political application. And there was no way I was not going to do it.

**Q: You raised your son alone?**

**Lakoff**: I was a single parent for fourteen years—when my son was four until he was eighteen.

**Q: How did you manage it?**

**Lakoff**: I worked my ass off. There was a day care center that was very important. That helped a lot. I did my best. I wasn't the perfect parent. But he has turned out wonderful. He is the perfect parent.

He's amazing. That's the best thing. When you see your child being a great parent, there is nothing better.

**Q: Did you feel divided between the authoritarian and nurturing influences within yourself?**

**Lakoff**: No. My father was about as nurturing a person as you could possibly get. So he taught me.

**Q: And did you find yourself channeling that?**

**Lakoff**: All the time. Always channeling him.

My father didn't have a chance to go to high school, much less college. He always wanted to do good things in the world. And he wasn't educated enough to do it. Didn't know enough. Didn't know the kinds of things he needed to know. And I'm so aware of that you can't believe it. I'm just aware of it every day. And I get students in my classes—I teach at a state university because I believe in public education—who are the first in their families to go to college, a lot of them, and they are marvelous kids.

I started off teaching at Harvard. But I wanted to be at a public university. That's much better for me.

My mother is a kick. She never understood anything I did. And it didn't matter. The only books on her bookshelf were those written by her sons. And so when I gave her my dissertation book, she put it on her bookshelf next to my brother's books, and she said, "You know, the next book you write, it really should be a red one."

The first day I taught at Harvard was interesting. I come back to the apartment and the phone is ringing. I pick up the phone and it's my mother. She says, "So how did it go?" and I say, fine. And she says, "The kids—did they behave?" She had never been past grammar school. So I said, "Well, a few smart alecks, but pretty much OK." And she says, "And the principal? Did he sit in your class?"

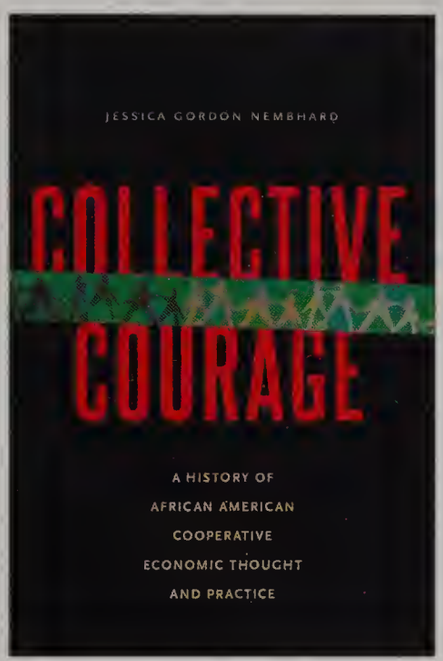
It was beautiful. Because it didn't matter. She didn't know if I was teaching in a local high school—it would have been the same thing.

**Q: How did you come to imagine yourself as a professor?**

**Lakoff**: First of all, my brother was ten years older and he became a professor first. My brother taught at Harvard before I did. And when I was applying to MIT, they usually had a parent come in. My mother couldn't come up and my father had died, so my brother acted as my pseudo-parent. So he was sitting outside as a Harvard instructor and I went through my interview. At one point, they noticed that I had a C-plus in German for one grading period. And I had gotten that because I had done A work but my papers were always late. So my teacher, to teach me a lesson, gave me a C-plus for one grading period. Fine. She was a good teacher and I loved her, but my papers were late. So he called my brother, and said, "I see this C-plus in German. What was going on there?"

My brother interrupted him and said, "Well, he's not going to be a linguist!"

Oops. ◆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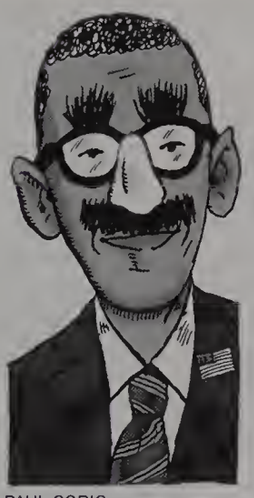
# Obama's Fifty Shades of Cool

It was more amusing than piano-playing kittens in mittens to see President Obama plug the Affordable Care Act on Zach Galifianakis's Internet comedy show. Not a public affairs show. Not late night. Not even basic cable. An Internet show: *Between Two Ferns*. Funnier still was the President wearing the same expression he normally keeps in the bottom desk drawer for Bill O'Reilly interviews.

The chief executive is obviously working his way down the marketing food chain. Next it'll be ObamaCare coupons under windshield wipers in the parking lots of flea markets. One of those page-and-a-third color sheets wrapping the Sunday comics. Then a series of laminated ads posted above urinals. Until finally Joe Biden is twirling a sign on Pennsylvania Avenue while wearing a giant syringe costume.

The President also has the advantage of possessing a practiced hand at this humor game. Having laid down some finely honed comedy chops at previous functions o'plenty: the White House Correspondents' Dinner, the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Event, the New Hampshire Primary, not to mention five State of the Union Addresses.

This appearance was an exceptionally prodigious display because the bearded comic from the *Hangover* franchise has used his trademark condescending snark to defeat many of his fellow professional comics. Forty-four, however, traded disdainful barbs with Galifianakis like a Catskills-trained tummler. Looks like that long, painful ordeal of getting along with Hillary's State Department staff finally paid off. Can't wait for him to attack Putin with the same sort of Borscht Belt pushback.



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This was Comedy Obama at his finest, just one of the many guises we've seen Honolulu's favorite son adopt. There's Diplomatic Obama. Arrogant Obama. Frustrated Obama. Tolerant Obama. Supercilious Obama. Cocky Obama. Uncocky Obama. New Boss Obama. Same as the Old Boss Obama. Obama from Mars. Obama from Venus. Hollywood Obama. Mississippi Obama. DC Obama. AC Obama.

As a matter of fact, the country is thisclose to contracting a serious case of Multiple Presidential Personality Disorder. He's President Sybil—playing more roles than the tall kid who shaves at a summer Shakespeare camp. A lycanthropic protagonist straight out of *Harry Potter 8*. Wouldn't be surprised to find out that full moons disturb him.

Doctors say the onset of Dissociative Identity Disorder can be traced to trauma, meaning the Republican Party could be found responsible for these many faces of Eve, er, Barack. For five years, the President has been hit in the head more often than an armless soccer goalie in a World Cup shootout. Then again, he could be setting himself up for an insanity defense. Mitch McConnell would be well advised to hire extra security.

The Oval Office Shapeshifter's pre-POTUS résumé was comparatively tame. Kenyan. Kansan. Hawaiian. Community organizer. Constitutional law professor. State Senator. U.S. Senator. Marijuana advocate. Audacity encourager.

It's only since 2009 that the world has been treated to the full kaleidoscope of eccentric facets. He's a jock. A nerd. Cheerleader. Teacher's pet. Motorcycle-riding bad boy. Closet boy band geek. Party standard-bearer. Goodwill ambassador. Policy enforcer. Al Green impersonator.

He's half black. He's half white. Ramrod. Contortionist. Healer. Divider. Defender of transparency. Master spy. Outlaw. Sheriff. Muslim. Christian. Politician. Citizen. Figurehead. Hood ornament. White-hatted hero. Melodramatic villain. A puppet, a poet, a pawn, and a king.

Even the GOP can't decide if he's a naïve novice or a demagoguing dictator. The rightwing paints him as a radical revolutionary while the left whines that he's a cowering conciliator. Making him a little bit Malcolm X and a little bit Urkel.

Barack Hussein Obama is harder to pin down than an eel in a butter sculpture. Who will he morph into this week? The Nobel Peace Prize winner or the Manchurian Candidate? The classiest of cats or Captain Clueless? Relentless shark or a spineless jellyfish? Power-mad knight errant or lute-strumming eunuch? Maybe, just maybe, he's all of them. Fifty shades of cool. Or drool. It all depends on perspective. ◆

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*Will Durst is an award-winning, nationally acclaimed political comic. Go to willdurst.com to find more about his new CD, "Elect to Laugh," and calendar of personal appearances, and to 3stillstanding.com for info on the documentary film in which he's an integral piece.*

# Coach Pop's Surprising Politics

Amidst the storms of the NBA playoffs, in the highly combustible Western Conference there is one team that year in and year out is able to maintain a stunning consistency: the San Antonio Spurs.

In the smallest of NBA markets, they have, over the last two decades, not only survived, but thrived.

Much of their recent success has been anchored by the greatest power forward in NBA history: two-time Most Valuable Player Tim Duncan.

The other mainstay, the person who has organized a team of dead-eye shooters and unselfish passers around the unflappable Duncan, is their future Hall of Fame coach, Gregg Popovich. No one doubts that the man they call Coach Pop is one of the finest to ever patrol a sideline. But even more intriguing than his command of X's and O's is what we could call "the politics of Pop."

Superficially, Popovich looks like the 1960s stereotype of a "hard hat" who smacks around hippies for sport. He has the crew cut, the Air Force pedigree, and the gruff demeanor that Archie Bunker would approve of. But look again.

I first became curious about the politics of Pop in 2011 when I was doing a book event with John Carlos, the 1968 Olympian immortalized when he raised his black-gloved fist after the 200-meter sprint, and Professor Cornel West. After the event, a member of the crowd came forward. It was Popovich. He had come to the panel without fanfare, after reading about our appearance in the *Village Voice*. Coach Pop then proceeded to buy copies for everyone on the Spurs.

I went up to Coach Pop and tried to make him feel at ease, assuming, wrongly, that he might feel a bit like a fish out of water.

I said to him, "The person with John Carlos is Cornel West."

Coach Pop shot back, "I know who Cornel West is. I do have a life, you know."

Coach Pop told me his story of seeing John Carlos and gold-medal winner Tommie Smith do the fist salute when he was a young man in the U.S. Armed Forces, and said that "it electrified me."

After this event, I started to research to see if Pop had made any political comments in the past. I saw that he was tangentially connected to one of the more inspiring collisions of sports and politics in recent years. On Cinco de Mayo in 2010, following the passage of Arizona's anti-immigrant SB 1070 profiling bill, the Phoenix Suns, led by their point guard, Steve Nash, announced that they would be wearing jerseys that read simply "Los Suns" for their playoff game against the Spurs. There was a great deal of criticism aimed at the Suns for "bringing politics into sports." But it was Coach Pop who quickly defused any negative heat by saying that he was angry that the league nixed his request to have his team wear a jersey that read "Los Spurs."

The night before the game, Pop said, "It's kind of like 9-11 comes, and all of a sudden there's a Patriot Act, just a knee-jerk sort of thing that changes our country and what we stand for. This law smacks of that to some degree, so I think what [the Suns are] doing tomorrow night is very wise and very correct."

Similarly, last year, when Jason Collins became the first openly gay player in NBA (and major league U.S. sports) history, Popovich was immediately supportive of Collins, setting a tone for the rest of the league to follow.

If you are a person without a team to root for during these NBA playoffs, keep an eye on the Spurs and keep an eye on Coach Pop. He is one person in sports who we could all stand to hear from a great deal more. ◆

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*Dave Zirin is the host of Sirius XM Radio's popular weekly show, "Edge of Sports Radio," and the sports editor for The Nation magazine. His newest book is "Game Over: How Politics Has Turned the Sports World Upside Down" (The New Press).*

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## You

Did it begin with the sky holding back its rain like a fist

stopping just short of your face, the slight rush

of air on your jaw? You'd rather a thunderhead's anvil

stalking as you back into a room

with a lock, because that actual fist

clenched round a storm could let loose,

break down the door. Now you're stuck

in the bathroom trying to retrace the map

that got you here. You lean on the wall,

slide to the floor as the shouting grows stronger,

loud bang on the door. If you climbed out the window

where would you go? How could you run

carrying that heavy sky on your shoulders?

*—Kathleen Aguero*

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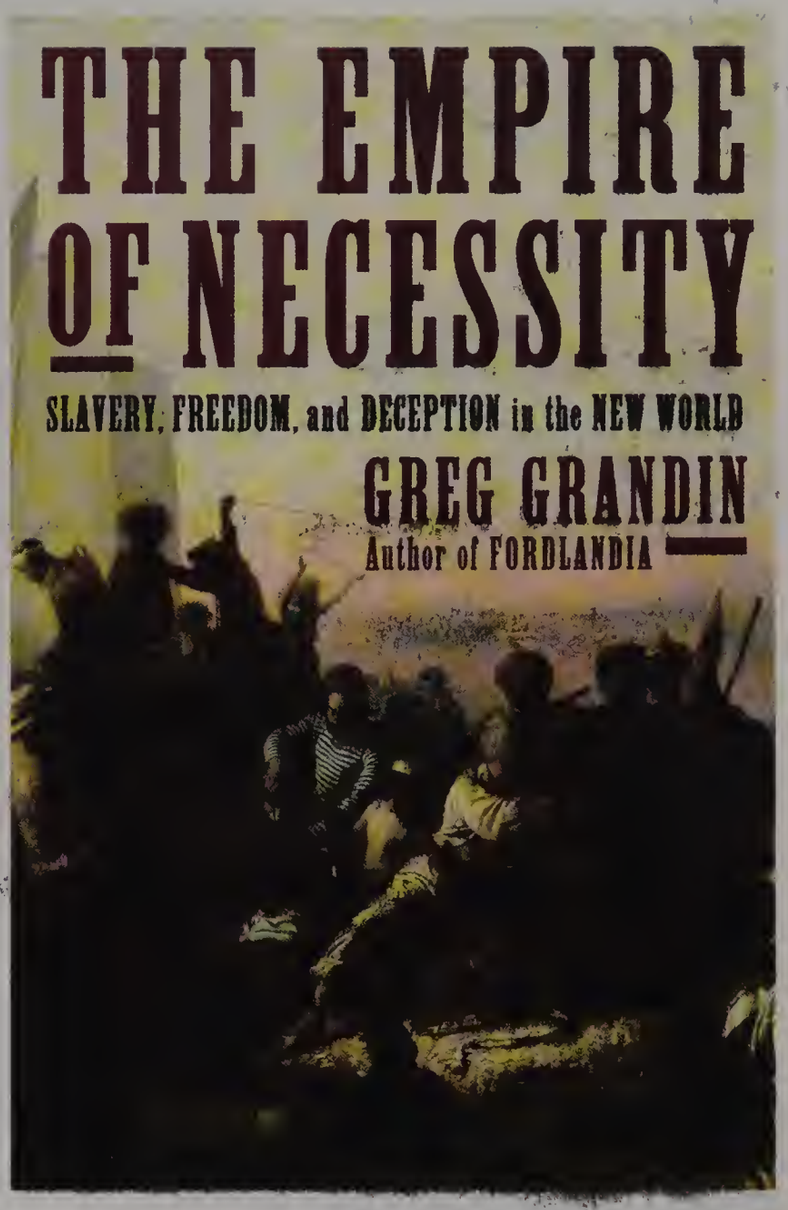
*Kathleen Aguero's poetry collections include "Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth," "Daughter Of," "The Real Weather," and "Thirsty Day." Her latest collection, "After That," was published by Tiger Bark Press last fall.*

# Hidden History of Slavery

**The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World**
*By Greg Grandin*
*Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Company. 360 pages. $30.*




By Kevin Alexander Gray

*"Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that has given the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have created world trade, and it is world trade that is the pre-condition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance. . . . Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations."*—Karl Marx's letter to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov, December 28, 1846

Throughout the years, I've read a lot of books on enslavement to find my personal and historical bearing. For me, *The Empire of Necessity* fits right in along with Hugh Thomas's *The Slave Trade*, James Michener's *Caribbean*, and C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*. New York University Professor Greg Grandin's work ably grasps the scale, depravity, economy, rationale, and irrationality of the international "free trade" of people.

The title comes from the epigraph to Herman Melville's short story "The Bell Tower." Grandin also pivots off of Melville's *Benito Cereno*, published in 1855, six years before the start of the Civil War. It tells the tale of a rebellion of enslaved West Africans onboard the slave ship *Tryal* off the west coast of South America. They kill the crew and the slaver who planned to sell them, seize the ship, and take the captain hostage.

From that story, based on fact, Grandin takes the reader back to the early nineteenth-century slave trade in and around South America. He shows how the colonial powers and a newly independent United States were woven into the immoral cloth of slavery. Grandin exposes the horrid "central paradox" of the "Age of Liberty" in the United States and "liberté, egalité, fraternité" in France that coincided with "the Age of Slavery." The Spanish Crown actually wanted *"más libertad, más comercio libre de negros"*: more liberty, more free trade of blacks.

Grandin lays out the core of his book:

*Benito Cereno* "tells the story of Amasa Delano, a New England sea captain who, in the South Pacific, spends all day on a distressed Spanish ship carrying scores of West Africans who he thinks are slaves. They aren't. Unbeknown to Delano, they had earlier risen up, slaughtered most of the crew, and demanded that the captain, Benito Cereno, return them home to Senegal. After Delano boards the ship (to offer his assistance), the West Africans keep their rebellion a secret by acting as if they are still slaves. Their leader, a man named Babo, pretends to be Cereno's loyal servant, while actually keeping a close eye on him.

"Delano thinks Cereno is in charge. As the day progresses, Delano grows increasingly obsessed with Babo and the seeming affection with which the West African cares for the Spanish captain. The New Englander, liberal in his sentiments and

*Kevin Alexander Gray is a writer and activist living in South Carolina.*

opposed to slavery as a matter of course, fantasizes about being waited on by such a devoted and cheerful body servant.

"Delano believes himself a free man, and he defines his freedom in opposition to the smiling, open-faced Babo, who he presumes has no interior life, no ideas or interests of his own. Delano sees what he wants to see. But when Delano ultimately discovers the truth—that Babo, in fact, is the one exercising masterly discipline over his inner thoughts, and that it is Delano who is enslaved to his illusion—he responds with savage violence."

Kudos to Grandin for writing about the obvious. Africans in his story have an inner self, as opposed to being just chattel or animals. Racists would like to have history written to say that the Africans who were brought to the New World were saved or better off. And that there was no home, no memories they could be ripped from, no past to remember, present to control, or future to think about. It may seem like a little thing, but the fact that Grandin often uses the term "enslaved African" as opposed to "slave" imbues a greater sense of humanity to the subject. One isn't born a slave; one is enslaved.

I've always been leery of calls for "free trade," because kidnapped Africans were victimized by proponents of free-trade ideology. As Grandin writes about those involved in the slave trade, a business just as corrupt as it was horrendous, "for them there would be no difference between what was called a crime and what passed for commerce."

I found *The Empire of Necessity* immediately useful. I was asked on a radio talk show whether or not I thought "stand your ground" laws were a "tool of African American male genocide." I asked the questioner to define genocide and didn't get an answer. I shot back with the figure Grandin cites that between 1525 and 1866, 12.5 million Africans were captured to be brought to the New World. Of those, 10.7 million survived the Middle Passage, disembarking in North America, the Caribbean, and South America. Only about 450,000 of those 10.7 million Africans ended up in North America, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. Today, there are 27 million people of African descent in the United States. The majority of enslaved Africans were taken directly to the Caribbean and South America; Brazil alone received 4.86 million Africans. Thus, talk of black genocide in the Western Hemisphere is hyperbole.

A good many African Americans often make the mistake of thinking that they're the center of the African Diaspora. It's a consequence of buying into the myth of "American Exceptionalism." Others simply forget, don't know, or dismiss the millions of other people of African descent, not so much in the Caribbean, but certainly in Central and South America.

I was drawn to Grandin's book after reading his *New York Times* essay "Obama, Melville, and the Tea Party." In it, he reflected back to a 2009 bookstore display in New York City with fifty of the books President Obama read as a young man. One of the books was *Benito Cereno*. Grandin fashioned Obama as a modern-day Babo (the African on the ship who pretended to be enslaved). That piqued my interest in his work.

Grandin then goes on to say Obama "hasn't been able to escape the shadow of Babo. He is Babo, or at least he is to a significant part of the American population—including many of the white rank and file of the Republican Party and the Tea Party politicians they help elect." I'm still trying to get my mind around the image of Obama as Babo.

Though Marx came along many years after the period covered in this book, Grandin reinforces Marxist theory that "in both the United States and Spanish America, slave labor produced the wealth that made independence possible." Slavery, as Grandin notes, "was the flywheel on which the whole thing turned."

"It wasn't just their labor that spurred the commercialization of society," Grandin writes. "The driving of more and more slaves inland, across the continent, the opening up of new slave roads and the expansion of old ones, tied hinterland markets together and created local circuits of finance and trade. Enslaved peoples were at one and the same time investments (purchased and then rented out as laborers), credit (used to secure loans), property, commodities, and capital, making them an odd mix of abstract and concrete value."

Marx wrote that "freedom and slavery constitute an antagonism" with good and bad sides, and sarcastically added, "The only thing that has to be explained is the good side of slavery." That's not so different from what Grandin lays out. It's something to bear in mind when one hears the slander that blacks are economic deadweight.

Growing up in the South, one would often hear, "You can't keep a man down unless you're down there with him." Or as Melville's Ishmael asked in *Moby Dick*, "Who ain't a slave?" I suppose now it would be, "Who isn't enslaved?" ◆

Springtime in D.C.
By Ian Murphy
THE GRASS IS GREEN, THE CHERRY TREES ARE IN BLOOM, AND L'AMOUR* IS IN THE AIR...
*FREEDOM FEELINGS
SOME FALL FOR THEMSELVES ALL OVER AGAIN...
GREGORY, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH, YOU MARVELOUS SON OF A BITCH.
SOME FIND FEELINGS WHERE THEY NEVER EXPECTED TO CONTRIVE THEM...
I'M A HIP YOUNG PERSON AND I DON'T WANT TO PAY FOR ETHNICS WHO'RE TOO LAZY TO GET OFF THE DAVENPORT. THAT'S WHY I ♥ THE GOP.
SOME BEGIN TO PREMATURELY EXPLORE THEIR AFFECTION FOR CORN...
AND IOWA'LWAYS LOVE YOOOOOU!
SOME REDISCOVER OLD PHILOSOPHICAL LOVES, FOR PURELY SELFISH REASONS...
THAT'S ME!
I CONSIDERED POLITICIANS TO BE PARASITES.
SOME JUST GET REALLY CREEPY WITH IT...
UNCLE SUGAR'S GOT SOME SWEET, SWEET BIRTH CONTROL FOR YA, BABY.
SOME DISCOVER A BIPARTISAN CONNECTION THEY NEVER KNEW THEY COULD HAVE...
WE'RE SO CLOSE, WE FINISH EACH OTHER'S...
...UNCONSTITUTIONAL SURVEILLANCE.
SOME GO ON ROMANTIC OUTINGS WITH INDUSTRY LOBBYISTS...
ONE DAY, WE'LL HAVE A PLACE JUST LIKE THIS TO RUIN FOR PROFIT.
EXXON
AWWWWWW!
AND THE EMOTIONALLY CONSERVATIVE STICK TO THE TIME-HONORED TRADITION OF SOLICITING GAY SEX IN A PUBLIC RESTROOM.
I'VE BEEN HURT BEFORE.

*Ian Murphy is the editor of The Beast, based in Buffalo, New York.*

# Tax the Churners

Have you heard about high frequency trading? Get ready to be dazzled! High frequency trading means sweeping, purely speculative financial transactions that have been made possible by huge leaps in technology. Using superfast computers and mathematical algorithms, traders search millions of prices at lightning speed and place bets automatically. Transaction times are measured in milliseconds, as the global network of "trading robots" never sleeps, and its sole function is to allow the wealthiest speculators to skim quick profits.

Guess how much in taxes folks pay on the sales in this game? When I buy a $3 pack of toilet paper here in Austin, Texas, I pay an extra 8.25 percent in sales tax. But if a high roller in the high frequency trade game buys $10 million worth of corporate stock, he or she pays zero tax on the sale.

That's why we need a financial transaction tax. The financial transaction tax is not an idea whose time has come; it's time has just returned. From 1914 to 1966, our country taxed all sales and transfers of stock. Today, forty countries have the financial transaction tax, including the seven with the fastest-growing stock exchanges in the world. Seven members of the European Union voted for the tax (including France and Germany) to help blunt rising poverty, restore services, and put people back to work.

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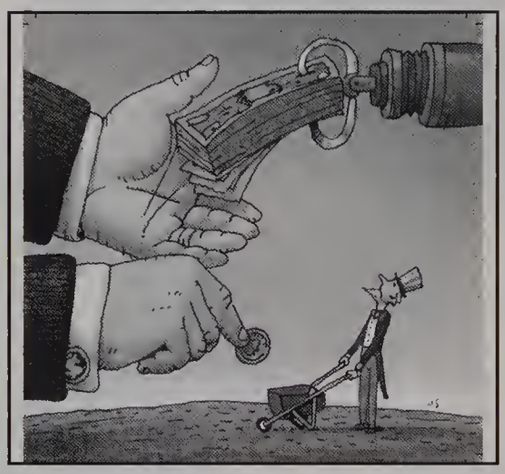
*Jim Hightower produces The Hightower Lowdown newsletter and is the author, with Susan DeMarco, of "Swim Against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow."*

This is no soak-the-rich idea. Rather than asking the Wall Street crowd to join us in paying a 6 to 12 percent sales tax, the major financial transaction tax proposal gaining support in the United States calls for a 0.5 percent assessment on stock transactions. That's 50 cents on a $100 stock buy, versus the $8.25 I would pay for a $100 bicycle.

Even at this miniscule rate, the huge volume of high speed trades means such



JEM SULLIVAN

a tax would net about $300-350 billion a year for our public treasury. Plus, it's a very progressive tax. Half of our country's stock is owned by the 1 percenters, and only a small number of them are in the high-speed game. Ordinary folks who have small stakes in the markets, including those in mutual and pension funds, are called "buy-and-hold" investors—they do trades only every few months or years, not daily or hourly or even by the second, and they'll not be harmed. Rather, it's the computerized churners of frothy speculation who will pony up the bulk of revenue from such a transaction tax.

A financial transaction tax is an uncomplicated way for us to get a substantial chunk of our money back from high-finance thieves, and we should put the idea on the front burner and turn up the heat. Not only do its benefits merit the fight, but the fight itself would be politically popular.

The financial transaction tax idea is blessed with broad support, ranging from Bill Gates to Occupy Wall Street to the Vatican, and it's been embraced by dozens of major economists, including Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman. But this fight will be won at the ground level of good politics, and that's well under way. Many grassroots groups and several progressives in Congress have already forged solid coalitions and are going to the countryside with a growing campaign to make Wall Street pay.

A major push is being made under the banner of the "Robin Hood Tax," led by National Nurses United, National People's Action, Health GAP, and Progressive Democrats of America. They and some 150 other organizations are backing the IPA. (This IPA is not a beer, though I suggest the organizers brew one to help popularize, cheer, and lubricate the cause.) It's the Inclusive Prosperity Act, a proposal by Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison and others for a financial transaction tax. Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa and Representative Peter DeFazio of Oregon have another version with a more modest tax rate.

A sales tax on speculators can deliver tangibles that people need but Wall Street says we can't afford, such as infrastructure, Social Security, education, good jobs. Just as important, it can deliver intangibles that our nation needs but Wall Street tries to ignore, such as fairness, social cohesion, and equal opportunity.

All that for a 0.5 percent tax on the top 1 percent! ◆

## MY FIGHT FOR A NEW TAIWAN

*One Woman's Journey from Prison to Power*

LU HSIU-LIEN AND ASHLEY ESAREY

*Foreword by Jerome A. Cohen*

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—ROSS TERRILL, author of *Mao: A Biography*

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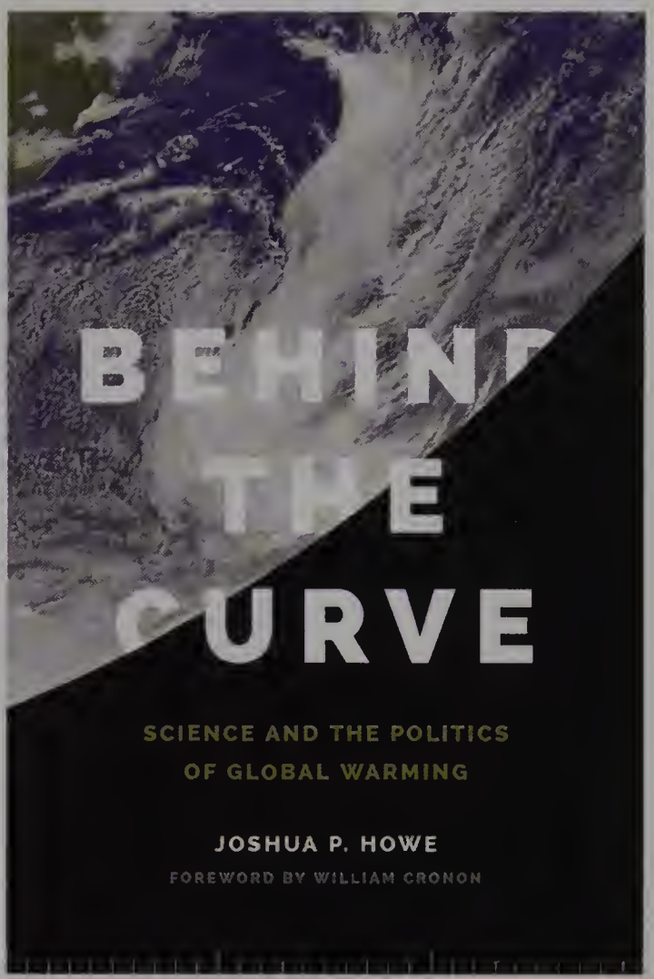


## BEHIND THE CURVE

*Science and the Politics of Global Warming*

JOSHUA P. HOWE

*Foreword by William Cronon*

"Scientists have proven to be right about the causes of a warming planet, but they have failed to stop the warming. In this important book, Howe examines how scientists and environmentalists have managed to get the science right and the politics wrong. Few books published this year will tell a more important story."

—RICHARD WHITE, author of *Railroaded*

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# in·vest *verb* \in-'vest\

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2. To spend or devote for future advantage or benefit.
3. *To devote morally or psychologically, as to a purpose; commit.*

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